

# Mankind, Kind man

By Benjamin Kurzweil



"The Ugly Duckling" original illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen.  
©2008 image enhancement by Jenna Rutigliano, Graphic Designer.

## Yoke or Joke?

When life is a burden,  
and a heavy yoke,

it can be eased for certain,  
with a little joke.

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

## **CONTENTS**

<b>FOREWORD</b>	Page 3
 <b>Ultra Short Stories</b> by Benjamin Kurzweil	
<b>The Gift Box</b>	Page 4
<b>The Gold Eggs</b>	Page 5
<b>When to unfold?</b>	Page 6
<b>The hare and the tortoise</b>	Page 7
<b>Too close will close</b>	Page 8
<b>A Chinese Light</b>	Page 9
<b>Who is the most valuable?</b>	Page 11
 <b>Short Stories</b> by Hans Christian Andersen	
<b>The Princess and the Pea</b>	Page 13
<b>The Ugly Duckling</b>	Page 16
<b>The Story of a Mother</b>	Page 23
<b>The Butterfly</b>	Page 26
<b>The Emperor's New Clothes</b>	Page 28
 <b>Short Story</b> by Benjamin Kurzweil	
<b>Mankind, Kind man</b> (historical fiction in 11 chapters)	Page 33 - 49
 <b>Poems</b> by Benjamin Kurzweil	
<b>Appendix A: Remake of ancient poems</b>	Page 50 - 51
<b>Appendix B: Comic puns</b>	Page 52 - 53

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

**FOREWORD**

### Aesop's ultra short stories

**Around 2.600 years ago**, in ancient Greece, lived a man called Aesop. Aesop was a Greek slave, who cracked jokes with his fellow slaves. Aesop told ultra short stories to slaves, who didn't have much time to listen to a story.

Aesop understood that in order for him to catch the attention of the slaves, he had to tell stories no longer than 30 – 60 seconds. Most of Aesop's Fables last no longer than 30 seconds and they are in fact jokes. A few of Aesop's Fables last longer - around 60 seconds - and they are considered ultra short stories (a bit longer than a joke).

### World Heritage Literature

All of Aesop's short stories have a point/moral, and many of them have become proverbs. Today many of us are using these proverbs without knowing its origin. For example, "*Do not count your chickens before they are hatched*", can be traced back to one of Aesop's Fables.

Aesop's stories are universal in their message and suitable for all generations and cultures, and have become part of world heritage literature. The same can be said about Hans Christian Andersen's tales, *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Emperor's New Clothes*, they can also be found in this poetry collection (page 16 and 28).

In this Poetry Collection, you will also find a small collection of ultra short stories by Benjamin Kurzweil, with a sort of blend like Aesop, but slightly longer, lasting around 1 - 5 minutes.

### Ultra short stories and short stories

Beside the **ultra short stories** (see page 4 – 12), you will also find **short stories** in this collection. Six of the short stories are written by Hans Christian Andersen, translated by Benjamin Kurzweil from the original Danish into English in 2008, so the English is up-to-date (see page 13 - 32).

The version of "*The Ugly Duckling*" in this PDF document is very unique for two reasons: The translation is an unabridged translation from the original Danish (from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish), having had the read-aloud component in mind (See page 16).

The short story *Mankind, Kind man* is a piece of historical fiction, taking place in Israel 2.000 years ago.

On page 13, 21, 25 and 32, you will find links to the same Hans Christian Andersen story, but with original illustrations and with fewer exclamation marks (H. C. Andersen used exclamation marks quite lavishly).

### Reading skills is the mother of all skills

**Reading skills is the mother of all skills.** Whatever you will be doing in your life, good reading skills will be the foundation to success.

**Storytelling has always been a way of sharing joy**, warmth and wisdom. It has always been cherished by all cultures and ages universally throughout history.

### Enjoy!

Benjamin Kurzweil

London, February 2012.

## The Gift Box

One day the king of Jerusalem decided to give the king of Babylonia a present.

The king of Jerusalem took one of the diamonds that was placed on his crown and said to the diamond, "You will become a present to the king of Babylonia," and then the king placed the diamond in a gift box and sealed the box.

A courier was ordered to bring the gift box to the king of Babylonia.

On the journey the courier went into unforeseen challenges and he deviated from the path. At a post office the courier decided to take a rest and gave the gift box to the postmaster in order to guard it. When the courier woke up he realised that the postmaster had mistakenly dispatched the gift box to another courier.

The second courier realised very late that the address on the gift box had the city of Babylon written on the label. The journey therefore took much longer than initially estimated.

Eventually the courier reached the city of Babylon and handed over the gift box to the king of Babylonia. When the king opened the box he saw to his delight a beautiful diamond.

The diamond looked very depressed and could not understand why it had been kept in darkness for such long time. The king of Babylonia answered that it had not been kept in darkness – the diamond had been kept in a gift box all the time during its journey from Jerusalem.

Finally the king of Babylonia placed the diamond on his crown and the diamond was shining forever.

**The moral of the story:** When a person goes through hardship in life, it always looks bad, because we always view the event from inside the box - where everything is pitch-black - but from outside the box, it might turn out you have been placed in a gift box.

Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## The Gold Eggs

There was a hen that laid gold eggs.

The owner was very happy with his hen and every day one egg of pure gold was laid.

One day the owner wanted to save the salary of the young man who took care of the hen. "Do I really need him?" said the owner to his wife, "I can be richer without him."

The young man was sacked and the owner was so happy with the money he saved.

After a couple of days the owner said to his wife, "Do I really need to feed the hen? Why not save the food for the hen? I can be richer without the cost of the food!"

The owner stopped buying food for the hen and the owner was so happy with the money he saved.

Now, the hen was not in such a good condition without food and the young man that maintained it and therefore the hen became sick.

After a couple of days the owner said to his wife, "Today the hen didn't lay an egg. Do I really need the hen? Why not slaughter the hen and take all the gold eggs? Ha, yes what a splendid idea!"

The owner slaughtered the hen and to his surprise no gold eggs were inside the hen.

- Jealousy, envy and greed had made him lose all his wealth.

His wife said, "Had you shared your wealth with the young man and the hen, then you would have been richer than you are. What shall we do now?"

"Well, you could make some chicken soup out of it," he said to his wife. And so the wife made a nice chicken soup for her husband - but the soup only lasted for that day.

**The moral of the story:** Greed is always short-sightedness and it doesn't pay in the long run. Better go for a win-win like the wife suggested, when she said, *"Had you shared your wealth with the young man and the hen, then you would have been richer than you are."*

Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## When to unfold?

There was a flower in a lovely garden that wasn't sure if it was the right time to unfold.

Every day families and children had their way through this lovely garden - playing, chatting, eating, drinking - watching the swans and ducks in the meadows. The young flower could not see all these things taking place, but it could hear the joy around and thought that perhaps the time to unfold was the right time.

A newly married couple was sitting on a bench next to the young flower talking, laughing, well, you know how it is when a newly married couple are holding each others hands and are looking into each others eyes. The young flower could not see them, because it was hiding itself behind its petals, but it could hear them.

Did the newly married couple have any doubts about their love? No, not at all. "Then you know," thought the flower. "Then you know."

Summer passed and the flower continued to listen to the world outside. It had still not decided to unfold.

Two pregnant women passed by and sat down on the bench next to the folded flower. They were good childhood friends and were sharing their experience about their pregnancy. One of the women, who had not given birth before, asked, "When do you know, when to give birth?" The more experienced of them laughed in a friendly manner, and said, "When is it the right time? Well, you *know* when it is the right time."

Autumn passed and the not so young flower continued to listen to the world outside. It had still not decided to unfold.

A poet passed by and sat on the bench next to the flower. The poet was an elderly man and he felt strongly about giving birth to his next book. The poet himself had been in great doubt for quite some time, but now, in late autumn, he finally gained that lovely inner feeling.

"Hmmm... Then you know," thought the flower. "Then you know."

Winter arrived and everything was quiet in the lovely garden. No children playing, no flowers blooming, no ducks chatting, but the not so young flower continued to listen to the world outside - although there was not so much to listen to in the cold winter time.

It had still not decided to unfold.

Then suddenly a ray of sunlight hit the flower and a curious lovely feeling from within aroused. That inner urge it had been longing for and envied the pregnant women, the married couple, and the lonely poet, that inner urge finally bloomed within the mature flower - and yes, it finally unfolded in the cold winter!

**The moral of the story:** You have probably heard the expression "late bloomer". A late bloomer is a person whose talents or capabilities are not visible to others until later than usual. Unless you are touched by the "sunlight" of warmth, you cannot unfold.

Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## The hare and the tortoise

In the city of London there was a hare that was so proud of his fine slim speedy legs.

Every day he jumped around boasting, "Haha, I am faster than the tortoise. What will become of this slow and useless tortoise?"

The Lord Mayor of London needed a fast runner and therefore he appointed the hare for a special task - to deliver a message to the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen.

The hare went off like a rocket and within seconds the hare was out of sight and on his way out of London.

The next day the tortoise went to the Lord Mayor of London and said, "Dear Lord Mayor, I hear that you are looking for someone to deliver a message to the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen. I am more than happy to help my city." The Lord Mayor laughed, "more than happy to help, well, the hare went off yesterday, and he is out of sight, he has probably left London, probably crossed the Channel. Try and go catch him, ha-ha-ha..."

So the tortoise went slowly to the city of Copenhagen with the special message from the Lord Mayor of London.

Meanwhile the hare had run so quickly that he was sure he had almost reached the city of Copenhagen, so he decided to rest for a while. "Ha, the tortoise wouldn't be appointed for this task anyway," thought the hare and he fell asleep with a good feeling.

During the hares sleep some road works near the city of Paris was taking place and the workers had set up some road blocks diverting the traffic to another city. The slow tortoise noticed this change of direction - simply because he was so slow - and could therefore easily read the signs on the road, so he decided to take a different path.

When the hare woke up from his sleep he went off like a rocket and although he noticed the road works, he ran so quickly that he could not read the road signs because of sheer speed. The hare ran and ran and ran and eventually he ended up in a Russian city, after crossing many rivers.

Finally the tortoise reached the city of Copenhagen with the message from the Lord Mayor of London. The Lord Mayor of Copenhagen was so happy to receive the message that he decided to give the tortoise a good reward.

Now, what happened to the hare? Well, he was later appointed tour guide by the Lord Mayor of London, because the hare had seen several German and Russian cities and rivers, and it made him able to tell so many things about what he had seen on his way to Copenhagen - the city he never reached.

**The moral of the story:** Some people start earlier than others, but that does not necessarily mean, that they also arrive earlier than others. In this story, the slow tortoise started later and arrived earlier.

(The story "*The hare and the tortoise*" was written with inspiration from one of Aesop's fables. I have given the old story a new twist.)

Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## Too close will close

Many years ago in a Chinese mountain, there was a snake that had to find its own rhythm in life.

The snake was growing and growing and therefore it did what was natural for it - to shed its skin. It did shed many tears as well, because shedding the skin was not a painless thing to do. Whilst the snake shed its skin, it became very vulnerable, and nearly lost its sight from time to time. But every time it had completed the process of shedding its skin, it regained its sight with even greater strength.

One day - after it had completed the process of shedding its skin - the skin rebuked the snake for shedding its skin. The skin said to the snake, "Why did you leave us? We were so close to you. We were your own skin, almost your own flesh!"

And the hedgehogs came in front of the snake and rebuked it for having acted in a wrong manner with its own skin. "You should not have shed your skin," said the hedgehogs, "you should have done like us."

When winter came, the hedgehogs slept together so that they could keep each other warm. But the hedgehogs slept too close to each other, and killed each other with their spines. Some of the hedgehogs survived and learned the lesson - they slept with a greater distance from each other, but the distance was too great and the remaining hedgehogs died of cold.

When spring came knocking at their door, only the snake had survived the winter.

The snake left the cave and went down to the local village. In the village there was a married couple known for being very devoted to each other. The snake thought that this house would probably be the right place to stay. The snake found a place near the chimney where nobody would notice it.

Every day the wife would serve a fish for her husband and every day he would eat up the fish and say, 'thank you'. Before serving the fish, the wife always ate the head of the fish, leaving the rest of the fish for her husband.

One day the wife didn't eat the head of the fish. She brought the whole fish into the dining room where her husband was ready to eat his dinner. When the wife had placed the whole fish in front of her husband, and her husband was about to eat, he noticed that the head of the fish had not been eaten. The wife said to her husband, "As you probably have noticed, I haven't eaten the head of the fish this evening." "Yes," nodded her husband, "you have always eaten the head of the fish before I start eating."

The wife sat down, next to her husband, and said, "Since the first day of our marriage, I always had the desire to ask you this question. Today, after 40 years of marriage, I finally decided to ask you this question." "Please, ask your question," said her husband.

The wife looked into the face of her husband with the same devoted eyes she always had shown him, since the first day of their marriage. The wife said, "I always wanted to eat the tail of the fish." "Oh," said her husband, "I always wanted to eat the head of the fish." The wife smiled and said, "But I always thought you wanted the tail of the fish."

And they both laughed.

The snake heard their conversation and said, "So close to each other and yet so far away."

When winter came, the snake went back to the cave, where the snake saw a new group of hedgehogs. This group were different from the hedgehogs from the year before.

This group of hedgehogs had mastered the right degree of separation, so that they could benefit from the warmth of the group, without hurting each other.

**The moral of the story:** There is a well known expression called "*The hedgehog's dilemma*", or sometimes "*The porcupine dilemma*". In this story the moral is built-in into the story in the last sentence.

Planet Earth is within the right distance from the Sun; not too close, not too far. Written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## A Chinese Light

Once upon a time a poet bought himself a Chinese candle.

After a long and tiring voyage all the way from the land of China, the candle finally stood on the poet's desk. It was a very fine and beautiful candle with a piece of paper wrapped around it. On the paper it was written that the light had been made according to a very old Chinese tradition, and that the craftsmanship of this old tradition should guarantee the quality of the candle.

The poet didn't want to light the Chinese candle; he really didn't have to burn such a fine piece of work, he was easily satisfied by glow from the Danish tea-light that stood right next to the Chinese light.

One late winter's night, it happened that the poet became tired and sad. Outside it was cold and very quiet. The poet was getting cold. "Warmth doesn't come from outside, but from within," he said to himself, but nevertheless he wrapped himself in a woollen blanket. This cheered him up. He really wanted to write, but was so tired that he began to complain about the darkness. "Better to light a candle than complain over the darkness," said the Chinese candle to the poet. He turned his head towards the light and smiled, thinking, "It is so true, what the Chinese light says." He rose from his chair to fetch a match, but although he searched and searched, there was no matchbox to be found.

The Danish tea-light felt very envious because of all the attention the Chinese light received, so it said with great arrogance, "In order to light a candle, you must have something to light it with, right?" The Chinese light didn't get agitated by the tea-light; it simply said these comforting words to the poet, "You don't need to have matches to light a candle. You can also do it just by saying 'Candle, light yourself,' and the candle will light straight away."

The poet went back to his chair and said, "Candle, light yourself!" The Chinese candle was lit straight away. The poet became very happy, because it worked, and so he turned his face towards the tea-light, saying, "Candle, light yourself!" The tea-light also lit straight away. The poet's happiness increased and increased and his inner tiredness disappeared. He wasn't cold anymore, so he took off the woollen blanket and smiled to the Chinese candle while he thought, "Warmth doesn't come from outside, it comes from within."

The envious tea-light became furious, and with great arrogance it said, "I don't want to be lit by your words, I want to be lit by a match!" The tea-light's wax became liquid and waved back and forth because of its arrogance. The tea-light repeated that it didn't want to be lit by the poet's words, which resulted in the tea-light drowning in its own arrogance. And so the flame of the tea-light went out.

The poet didn't answer the tea-light because he had fallen asleep in his chair. And while he slept, the Chinese light continued to burn and to warm the poet's heart.

When he woke up next morning, the Chinese light was still burning because it had been made according to a good old Chinese tradition.

**The moral of the story:** There are several layers of meaning to this story. The simple meaning is that enviousness never pays and wisdom always prevails.

Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

### Q&A fun

A Chinese Light is a story about two forces: the Chinese light, representing the great Chinese tradition of Taoism (see poems of Tao Te Ching), and the Danish tea-light (in Danish: fyrfadslys), representing mediocrity and enviousness.

In Danish there is an expression called "lyseslukker" (in English: spoilsport); someone who ruins the happiness of others, someone who turns hope away from people.

There is a Chinese proverb that goes against the spoilsport mentality. This proverb says: "*Better light a candle, than complain about the darkness.*"

**Question 1:** Why did the poet feel so cold?

A1: He had not paid his heating bill.

A2: Danish winters are very cold.

A3: He was not in contact with his inner light.

**Question 2:** Why is the tale talking about "light" and candlelight?

A1: It is the same whether you say "light" or candlelight.

A2: The tale constantly shifts between a literal reading and a figurative reading.

A3: For poetic reasons the author shifts between "light" and "candlelight" - no other reason.

**Question 3:** When the poet woke up next morning, the Chinese candlelight was still burning. Why was it still burning?

A1: The Chinese candle had a thick wick.

A2: The Danish tea-light had a wicked wick.

A3: Wisdom always prevails.

## Who is the most valuable?

Five fingers discussed which of them was the most valuable.

At the very moment that the hand was about to put its grip on the door handle, the five fingers began to part and argue their worth. "I am the most valuable," said the thumb with its head upright. "Without me, you can't open the door. Just take a look." And then the thumb took its firmest grip on the door handle. The door handle didn't turn at all; most fingers would have given up after this much effort, but the thumb had an unusually strong will and physical strength, so he continued his attempt to turn the door handle. Some time later he realised his inadequacy and the thumb turned his head downward.

The forefinger raised itself and said with great confidence, "I am the most valuable. Just take a look." And then he took a smart grip on the door handle. "I don't want to be called forefinger, I want to be called chief-forefinger," thought the forefinger because he was longing for honour and glory. The forefinger tried and tried, but he too couldn't succeed in turning the door handle.

The middle finger stepped forward and said "I am not only the tallest with regards to height; I also have the greatest wisdom. I just need to look at the door handle and my wisdom will open the door." The middle finger tried with a long-fingered attempt, but he also failed to turn the door handle.

Then the ring finger stepped forward and said "I am the most valuable. I can open the door with my art. I am the love finger, just take a look." Then the ring finger began to sing a love song, but it happened for the ring finger as it had done for the others - the door handle didn't move.

Finally, the little finger stepped forward and said "Yes, I know I can't open the door alone. On my own I am too little and too weak. However, if we unite, we will succeed in opening the door!" All the fingers agreed to unite for the task. Together they took a grip on the door handle and very easily they succeeded in opening the door.

**The moral of the story:** As always throughout world history, anything great is accomplished when people stand together hand in hand. Story written by Benjamin Kurzweil

## Who is the most valuable?

**In some teachings, each finger represents a certain quality.** For example, the forefinger symbolises the craving for honour, whereas the little finger has the quality of being diplomatic.

Each quality can be very important and valuable in certain situations, but eventually all the fingers realise that only if they join forces can they accomplish something great; opening up a new opportunity, opening up the door.

As always throughout world history, anything great is accomplished when people stand together hand in hand.

*Five fingers discussed which of them was the most valuable.*

*At the very moment that the hand was about to put its grip on the door handle, the five fingers began to part and argue their worth. "I am the most valuable," said the thumb with its head upright. "Without me, you can't open the door. Just take a look."*

When the hands and fingers are working together, life will show the contour lines of a swan (see photo).



Photo: Designer Elyse Allen.

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

**Q&A fun**

**When you choose fairytales/fantasy stories as your platform**, then you can play more easily with symbols, because “items” have become “human” and you are not limited to what is “possible” in real terms. This style also lends itself more easily to gentle humour. It is an act of balance, not to play with the symbols too childishly and yet to find a symbolic play and value that has not already been worn down by cliché. Compared to the genre called “social realism”, the fairytale/fantasy story has another advantage: it does not single out certain people or towns, but tries to prove its point by the use of **universal language**.

**Question 1:** How many fingers are mentioned in this fable?

- A1: Two.
- A2: Tree.
- A3: Five.

**Question 2:** Which of the fingers says: “I am the most valuable. I can open the door with my art.”

- A1: The thumb.
- A2: The ring finger.
- A3: The middle finger.

**Question 3:** As always throughout world history, anything great is accomplished when people stand together hand in hand. Which of the fingers says: “If we unite, we will succeed in opening the door.”

- A1: The little finger.
- A2: The forefinger.
- A3: The thumb.

**Question 4:** Who said the following: *“If you can't explain it in a simple way, you don't understand it well enough.”*

- A1: Your teacher.
- A2: Stevie Wonder.
- A3: Albert Einstein.

**Question 5:** Who said the following: *“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”*

- A1: Albert Einstein.
- A2: Nelson Mandela.
- A3: Bill Clinton.

## The Princess and the Pea

Once upon a time there was a prince, who wanted to marry a princess, but she had to be a real princess.

That's why he travelled all around the world to find one, but everywhere there was something wrong. There were plenty of princesses, but he couldn't quite work out if they were real princesses; there was always something that wasn't quite right. Eventually he came home again, but he was so sad because he so much wanted to have a real princess.

One evening the weather became dreadful: there was thunder and lightning; the rain poured down; it was quite frightening! Then, there was a knock at the town gate, and the old king went out to open it.

It was a princess who stood outside, but my goodness, what a sight she was with the rain and the bad weather! Water was running down her hair and clothes, and it was running into the tips of her shoes and out of the heels, and she said she was a real princess!

"Well, we shall soon find out," thought the old queen, but she didn't say anything. Went into the bedroom, took off all the duvets and placed a pea on the bottom of the bed. Then she took twenty mattresses and laid them on top of the pea, and then placed another twenty feather duvets on top of the mattresses.

The princess had to spend the night there.

In the morning they asked her how she had slept.

"Oh, badly, terribly" said the princess. "I barely closed my eyes the whole night. Goodness knows what there must have been in the bed. I have been lying on something so hard that I am simply black and blue all over my body. It is so dreadful!"

Then they could see that she was a real princess, because through twenty mattresses and through twenty feather duvets she had felt the pea. Nobody could be so sensitive without being a real princess.

The prince then made her his wife, because he now knew that he had found a real princess.

And the pea was placed in the art-museum, where it is still to be seen unless someone has taken it.

See, that was a true story!

**The moral of the story:** Since this story was written by Hans Christian Andersen, I can only guess the meaning of this story, but I think this story is all about exaggeration and the fun that comes from its use. No reason to read more things into this story.

Story written by Hans Christian Andersen (1835)  
Translated by Benjamin Kurzweil (2008)

[This translation follows the number of exclamation marks that Hans Christian Andersen used so lavishly. If you prefer to read a version of [The Princess and the Pea with fewer exclamation marks, please click here.](#)]



Original illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen

## The Princess and the Pea

The fairytale *The Princess and the Pea* is the shortest fairytale Hans Christian Andersen ever wrote.

It is also one of his first fairytales and was in the first pamphlet he released in 1835.

Andersen wrote gems of wisdom. Please join me to hear some of these gems on this audiobook.

**Enjoy!**

### Q&A fun

The fairytale *The Princess and the Pea* is the shortest fairytale Hans Christian Andersen ever wrote.

It is also one of his first fairytales and was in the first pamphlet he released in 1835.

*The Princess and the Pea* was translated into English from the original Danish in 2008 by Benjamin Kurzweil.

**Question 1:** *The Princess and the Pea* is a story about a prince that travels all over the world because...?

- A1: The prince wanted to buy apples.
- A2: The prince wanted to marry a princess.
- A3: The prince liked to travel.

**Question 2:** Was the princess dry or wet when she knocked at the town gate?

- A1: The princess's hair and clothes were dry and fine.
- A2: The princess had a nice haircut, lovely clothes and a dog with her.
- A3: The princess had water running down her hair and clothes.

**Question 3:** In the morning they asked how the princess had slept. What did the princess answer?

- A1: The princess said she had slept perfectly fine.
- A2: The princess was black and blue all over her body.
- A3: The princess was disturbed because of the drilling by some builders.

**Question 4:** How many mattresses did the princess sleep on?

- A1: Ten mattresses.
- A2: Twenty mattresses.
- A3: Thirty mattresses.

**Question 5:** Whom did the prince marry?

- A1: The pea.
- A2: The king.
- A3: The princess.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Below you will find the translators enhanced explanation to *The Princess and the Pea*.

**The title “The Princess and the Pea” is slightly different in Danish.** In Danish you say ‘*Prinsessen på Ærten*’, which means “The Princess on the Pea”. I have been told that it is inappropriate to say “The Princess on the Pea”, because it phonetically collides with “pee”, and for read aloud, the listener hearing this, would think “What! Is she standing on the pee?!” This is obviously not a problem when you read the text yourself and can see the word “pea”. But Andersen’s stories were meant for read aloud, and not for reading it yourself, although this is enjoyable too.

Here is another important point to be mentioned to this phonetic confusion. The title “The Princess and the Pea” is a known title, and therefore people know that we are talking about a vegetable - a pea. That is also the reason why changing this title to “on the pea” will confuse the listener into thinking, “Hmmm, why this change of the title? It must be because the princess is standing on pee.” We are dealing with a rare coincidence where two words “pea” and “pee” phonetically collide, and therefore it is better to keep the old and known title, instead of the more correct one “The Princess on the Pea”.

Apart from English, in most languages I don’t think you will find the same phonetic collision with “pea” and “pee”, and therefore in other languages you could translate it to “The Princess on the Pea”.

(This is an example of that sometimes the less correct translation is better than the more correct translation. The same could be said about other areas of life, where the less correct could be better than the more correct.)

**In the Danish text, Andersen makes a play with the tip of her shoe;** not a word play, just a poetic play. Andersen is humanising the shoe by using the word ‘nose’ instead of ‘tip’ or *spidsen* in Danish.<sup>1</sup> It is clearly meant to take the listener by surprise, because Andersen was pointing at his nose, when he read it, switching to the tip of his shoe. Prior to this - in the same sentence - Andersen exaggerates the power of the rain. The water was not *dripping* from her hair; it was *running down* her hair. In Danish *løb ned* means ‘running down’; if Andersen had meant to say ‘water dripped from her hair’, he would have had to write *vandet dryppede ned ad håret*; but he used the word *løb* instead of *dryppede*, which is in line with the previous rhythm. The rain was so powerful that it was not only running down her hair, it also ran into her nose, which literally translated means “it was running into the nose of her shoe”. You would need to hear this spoken out loud to fully understand it. When reading the text aloud in Danish, one has to make a short pause after the word ‘nose’, and then say ‘of her shoe’, to confuse the children for a split second, making them think that the water was actually running into her nose, instead of the tip of her shoe.

(You will notice this very short pause when you listen to Benjamin Kurzweil’s reading of this fairytale in Danish, which is available on iTunes or Amazon MP3 download).

**In the original Danish version the author decided to shift between** the Danish words ‘*rigtig*’ (proper or correct or right) and ‘*virkelig*’ (real), merely for stylistic reasons and exaggerating reasons. Some translations use the word ‘true’, but the Danish word for true is ‘*sand*’, which does not appear in the story. Nevertheless you could end the story with the words, “There, this was a true story”. I have kept to the word ‘real’ throughout the story simply for phonetic reasons. ‘Real’ gives a better flow. Aside from the desire for variation, I am very ‘flow minded when it comes to spoken word.

Some hold that the story is about what is true and what is false, because of the use of the words ‘*rigtig*’ and ‘*virkelig*’, and because the story is about finding a true and real princess. It is a valid opinion, but I think this opinion is reading too much into the story, which is all about exaggeration and the fun that comes from its use. By using the words “proper” and “real”, Andersen is amplifying the exaggeration.

---

<sup>1</sup> **”Nose” versus ”tip”** - Not just in English, but also in Danish, it is odd to say “nose”, but the Danes have become used to this odd expression; hence they don’t take notice of it. In Danish you would say “toe”, and in English “tip” (tip of the shoe).

## The Ugly Duckling

It was so lovely out in the country; it was summer!

The wheat stood yellow, the oats green, the hay had been stacked in the green meadows, and there went the stork on his long red legs, chattering in Egyptian - for he had learnt that language from his mother.

Around the fields and meadows there were vast woods, and in the middle of the woods there were deep lakes. Yes, it was really lovely out in the country!

Right in the sunshine there lay an old manor-house with deep canals around it, and from the wall down to the water grew great leaves<sup>2</sup> – they were so tall that small children could stand under the biggest of them. It was just as wild under the leaves as in a wild forest, yet here sat a duck on her nest. She was waiting for her little ducklings to hatch out, but she was rather tired of it now because the sitting had lasted so long and she rarely had a visitor. The other ducks much preferred swimming around in the canals than running up and sitting under a leaf to gossip with her.

At last, one after another, the eggs began to crack. “Peep, peep,” they said. All the eggs had come alive and the ducklings were poking their heads out into the big world.

“Quack, quack!” said the mother duck and then the ducklings quacked quickly<sup>3</sup> and looked around under the green leaves, and their mother let them look as much as they wanted to, for green is good for the eyes.

“Wow, how big the world is!” said the young ones, for they had so much more space than when they were inside their eggs.

“Do you think this is the whole world?” said their mother. “It stretches a long way over to the other side of the garden, right into the parson’s field, but I have never been there. You are all here now, aren’t you?” Then she got up, saying: “No, I don’t have all of you; the biggest egg is still there. How much more time will it take? I am getting really fed up waiting for it!” Then she sat down again.

“Quack, quack, quack, err, wha...wha – what’s up, duck?” said an old duck who had come to pay a visit.<sup>4</sup>

“This last egg is taking such a long time,” said the mother-duck. “It just won’t hatch; but now you must see the others. They are the loveliest ducklings I have ever seen. They all look like their father, the wretch; he never comes to visit me!”

“Let me look at that egg that won’t hatch,” said the old duck. “I’ll bet it’s a turkey’s egg. I was once cheated like that too, and I had my sorrow and pain with the young ones, because they are afraid of the water. Yes, believe me, I couldn’t get them out! I quacked and clacked but it didn’t help. Let me see the egg. Yes, it is a turkey’s egg. Listen to me, teach the other children to swim, but that one - just get rid of it!”

“I’ll sit on it a little longer,” said the mother-duck. “I have been sitting so long now that I can wait a bit more, even if I have to wait until the end of the season!”

“Well, whatever!” said the old duck, and off she went.

At last the big egg cracked. “Peep, peep!” said the young one as he tumbled out. He was very big and rather ugly. The mother-duck looked at him. “It is a terribly big duckling,” she said. “None of the others look like that. Hopefully it is not a turkey-chick. Well, we shall soon find out: into the water he shall go, even if I have to kick him in myself!”

---

<sup>2</sup> **Great leaves** – Most English translations use the words ‘dock leaves’; which phonetically collide with the word ‘duck’ and could be confusing for the listener. ‘Dock leaves’ just mean ‘great leaves’; hence I have left it out. The original Danish text uses the word ‘skræppeblade’ of the species Rumex, which plays on the word ‘skræppe’, meaning ‘gossip’.

<sup>3</sup> **Quacked quickly** - In the Danish it says “*Rap! Rap!*” sagde hun, og så rappede de sig i alt hvad de kunne. The Danish word for quack is ‘rap’. Later in the same sentence, Andersen uses the word ‘rappede’, which is a play on the word ‘rap’. ‘Rappede’ means to rush or to do something quickly; hence I translated it to “quacked quickly”; keeping a sort of pun.

<sup>4</sup> **What’s up, duck?** – This is a deviation from Andersen’s original Danish text. I am playing with Bugs Bunny’s, “What’s up, doc?”

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

That day the weather was really heavenly, with the sun shining on all the green leaves. The ducklings' mother came out with all her family and went down to the water. "Splash!" She jumped into the water. "Quack, quack," she said and, one after another, the ducklings plopped in. The water rushed over their heads, but they came up again at once and floated beautifully; their legs moved automatically and all of them were out in the water. Even the ugly grey duckling joined in the swimming.

"No, it is not a turkey," said the mother-duck. "Look how beautifully he uses his legs and how straight he holds himself. He is my own little one. He is quite handsome if you look at him properly." "Quack! Quack! – Now, come along with me and let me show you the world and introduce you all to the duck-yard; but mind yourselves and stay close to me, so that nobody steps on you; and keep a sharp look-out for the cat!"

So they went into the duck-yard. There was a terrible noise going on, for there were two families fighting over the head of an eel, and then after all that fighting, it was the cat that got it.

"Look! That's the way of the world," said the mother-duck licking her bill, for she would have liked the eel's head too. "Use your legs," she said. "Hurry yourselves along and bow your heads to that old duck over there. She is the most distinguished of them all! She has Spanish blood, which is why she is so solid-looking. Did you notice she has a red ribbon tied around her leg?<sup>5</sup> That is something very special: it is the greatest distinction any duck can have and it really means a lot. It means that they don't want to get rid of her and that she shall be known by both animals and humans. Hurry up now! Don't turn your toes in! A well-brought-up duckling turns its toes out, like father and mother. Come on now, bow your heads and say 'Quack!'"

And so they did; but the other ducks round about looked at them and said quite loudly: "look at that, we shall have to share with that lot as well. As if there weren't enough of us as it is! Oh my goodness how that one duckling looks - we won't tolerate him!" Straight away, one duck flew at him and bit him in the neck.

"Leave him alone," said the mother-duck. "He is not harming anyone!"

"Yes, but he is too big and peculiar," said the duck that had pecked him. "Because of that he deserves to be bullied."

"Pretty children the mother has there," said the old duck with the red ribbon round her leg. "Every one of them pretty, except that one: he didn't turn out successfully. I wish you could make him over again!"

"That is not possible, Your Grace," said the ducklings' mother. "He is not good-looking, but he is very good natured and he swims so beautifully; like the others. Well, I dare say he even swims a bit better than them. I believe he will grow quite handsome and, in time, get a little smaller! He has lain too long in the egg, so he hasn't yet got the right shape." Then she preened at his neck and smoothed the rest of his body. "Besides, he is a drake," she said, "and so it doesn't matter so much. I believe he will be strong and he will make it!"

"The other ducklings are beautiful," said the old duck. "Anyway, make yourselves at home, and if you find an eel's head, then you can bring it to me."

So they made themselves at home.

But, the poor duckling, the last to hatch out of the egg, was pecked, pushed and mocked by the other ducks and hens, because he was so ugly-looking. "He is too big," they all said, and the turkey-cock, who had been born with spurs on his feet, and therefore thought he was an emperor, puffed himself up like a ship in full sail, went right up to him and shouted until he was red in the face. The poor duckling did not know where to stand or where to go; he was so miserable at being so ugly and at being the laughing-stock of the whole duck-yard.

---

<sup>5</sup> **Red ribbon tied around her leg** – In the original Danish text, Andersen is using the Danish word "*klud*", which means rag. In reality it is a reference to the rings that humans often place around the legs of various birds (bird ringing). Since Andersen is clearly playing on the perception that this is a mark of honour, I went a step further and named it a red ribbon, instead of a rag. Andersen is indicating that it is, in reality, a thing that has become elevated in the duck-yard although it is a rag.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

And so the first day passed, but it soon became worse and worse. The poor duckling was being chased by everyone. Even his own brothers and sisters were evil towards him and kept on saying, "If only the cat would get you, you ugly thing." Even his mother would say, "I wish you were far away." The ducks bit him, the hens pecked him, and even the girl who fed the animals kicked him.

Because of all this trouble he ran off and flew away over the fence, but the little birds in the bushes jumped, terrified, into the air. "That's because I am so ugly," thought the duckling, shutting his eyes, yet he ran on all the same. Then he came out into the great marsh where the wild ducks lived and there he lay the whole night. He was so tired and unhappy.

In the morning the wild ducks flew up and took a look at their new comrade. "What kind of fellow are you?" they asked as the duckling turned from one to another, greeting them as well as he could.

"You are so ugly," said the wild ducks, "but that makes no difference to us as long as you don't marry into our family." The poor thing, he had never thought about getting married. If only he could just have some peace, rest in the rushes and drink a little of the marsh water.

There he lay for two whole days before eventually there came two wild geese or, more correctly, two wild ganders, for they were cocks. It was not long since they had hatched, and were therefore very lively.

"Listen, pal," they said, "you are so ugly that we have come to like you. Do you want to come along with us and be a bird of passage? Listen, not far away from here, in another marsh, are some sweet, lovely wild geese; young ladies every one of them, and they can say 'Quack'. You could probably become a hit with the ladies, as hot as you are...."

"Bang! Bang!" it suddenly echoed from above. Both the ganders fell down dead in the rushes, and the water became red with blood. "Bang! Bang!" it sounded again and flocks of wild geese flew up from the rushes; again fresh shots rang out. A big shoot was in progress; the hunters lay ready all round the marsh; some even sat up in the trees on the branches that stretched far out over the rushes. The blue smoke from the guns drifted like clouds amongst the dark trees and hung far out over the water. The dogs came running through the mud; splash! splash! Rushes and reeds swayed on all sides. It was terrifying for the poor duckling, which turned its head to the side to hide it under its wing, but at that very moment there stood next to him a terrifyingly big dog.<sup>6</sup> Its tongue was hanging out of its mouth, showing sharp teeth and....splash! It went off again without touching him.

"Oh, thank goodness," sighed the duckling, "I am so ugly that even the dog doesn't want to bite me."<sup>7</sup>

So he lay quite still while the bullets whistled in the rushes and shot after shot went bang!

It was late in the day before all was quiet again, but the poor duckling dared not move. He waited several more hours before he looked around, and then hurried away from the marsh as fast as he could. He ran over fields and meadows, but there was a strong wind that made it difficult for the duckling to get away.

Towards evening he reached a poor little farmhouse. It was so poorly maintained that it hardly knew which way to fall, so it remained standing.<sup>8</sup> The wind whistled around the duckling so that he had to sit down to withstand it, yet it became worse and worse.<sup>9</sup> Then he noticed that the farmhouse door had come off one of its hinges and was hanging so twisted that he could slip into the living room through the crack, so that was what he did.

An old woman lived in the farmhouse with her cat and her hen. The cat, which she called Sonny, could arch his back and purr; he could even give out sparks if you stroked his fur the wrong way. The hen had short little legs, so she was called 'Chicky short-legs'. She laid well, and the woman was as fond of her as if she were her own child.

The next morning the strange duckling was spotted at once. The cat began to purr and the hen to cluck.

---

<sup>6</sup> **Terrifyingly big dog** – In the audio version I have chosen the grammatically incorrect "terrifying big dog", but flow-wise better. The 'ly' is changing the rhythm. It is the same with music. Some times the incorrect is better audio somatically.

<sup>7</sup> **"I am so ugly that even the dog doesn't want to bite me."** – This is a 19<sup>th</sup> century joke. The whole of Denmark was walking around laughing for days. The Danes could not get over this joke.

<sup>8</sup> **So it remained standing** – This is also a 19<sup>th</sup> century joke. It shows how humour has changed!

<sup>9</sup> **Sit down** – The original Danish text says "sit down on his rump". I have shortened it to 'sit down'.

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

“Uh, what’s that?” said the old woman, looking all around her. But her sight wasn’t good and so she thought the duckling was a fat duck that had strayed away. “My goodness what a nice catch,” she said. “I can have duck-eggs now, if only it isn’t a drake. Well, this we have to try.”

And so the duckling was taken on trial for three weeks, but no eggs appeared.

Now the cat was the master of the house and the hen was the mistress. Their favourite saying was ‘*We and the world*’, for they believed that they made up half the world – and the better half at that! The duckling thought that one could have a different opinion, but the hen would not hear of it.

“Can you lay eggs?” she asked.

“No.”

“Well then, you had better be quiet.”

And the cat said: “Can you arch your back, purr and give out sparks?”

“No.”

“Well then, you shouldn’t express an opinion when sensible people are talking!”

So the duckling sat in a corner of the room and was in a bad mood. Then the thought of fresh air and sunshine came into his mind and he got such a curious longing to float upon the water that at last he could not help telling the hen about it.

“What’s the matter with you?” she asked. “You have nothing to do<sup>10</sup> - that’s why you get these fancies. Lay an egg or purr and you will get over them.”

“But it is so lovely floating on the water,”<sup>11</sup> said the duckling, “so lovely to get it over your head and to dive down to the bottom.”

“Yes, that must be a great pleasure,” said the hen. “You must have lost your mind. Ask the cat, who is the cleverest person I know; ask him whether he likes floating on water or diving to the bottom! I’ll leave myself out of it. – Please, ask our mistress; ask the old woman yourself, for there is no one in the world cleverer than she. Do you think she has the desire to float or to get water over her head?”

“You don’t understand me,” said the duckling.<sup>12</sup>

“Yes! We don’t understand you. Who should then understand you? Don’t tell me that you are cleverer than the cat and the old woman, not to mention myself! Don’t make a fool of yourself, child, and thank the good Lord for all the good things that have been done for you. Haven’t you come into a warm room and found company that you can learn something from? But you are foolish and it isn’t easy to make company with you. Trust me; my intentions are good for you. I’m saying unpleasant things to you, but that’s how you can tell your true friends.

Now, just make sure that you lay eggs and learn to purr, or give out sparks!”

“I think I will go out into the wide world,” said the duckling.

---

<sup>10</sup> **You have nothing to do** – The young swan had lots of good things to do, it just didn’t fit into the hens worldview.

<sup>11</sup> **Floating on water** – Floating on water is a meditative state. From Wikipedia: “Flow is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. Proposed by positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the concept has been widely referenced across a variety of fields.”

<sup>12</sup> **“You don’t understand me,”** – This scene with the hen and the ‘aristocat’ is a funny scene that underlines a common situation between two different types of people. It is highlighted in this fairytale by the use of animals. Could it be clearer, when we know that a drake cannot lay an egg, that he cannot make this kind of contribution? It is also obvious that the drake cannot purr. The hen becomes generous and gives the drake a 3<sup>rd</sup> option, to ‘give out sparks’. The hen is absolutely convinced that she knows what is best for the young swan. “Who should then understand you?” she insists. The reader/listener can see the irony. How much can a cat understand about the nature of a swan? The cat would hate having water poured over it, or having to swim in water. Floating on water is just as contributory as to purr.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

"Well, go on then!" said the hen.

The duckling went on his way, floating on the water and dived below the surface, but none of the other animals would have anything to do with him because of his ugliness.

Eventually, autumn came. The leaves in the woods turned yellow and brown; the wind caught them and they danced around. Up in the air it looked cold and the clouds hung heavy with hail and snow-flakes. The raven perched on the fence, screaming "Oy! Oy!" from the sheer cold. Just thinking about it was enough to make you feel frozen. The poor duckling did not feel well.

One evening, when there was a lovely sunset, a flock of large and beautiful birds came out of the bushes. The duckling had never seen such handsome birds. They were shining white and had long graceful necks. The birds were swans. They uttered a strange noise, spread their splendid great wings and flew away from the cold regions to warmer countries and open lakes. They rose so high,<sup>13</sup> and the ugly duckling felt strange as he watched them. He wheeled around in the water and craned his neck in their direction, letting out a cry so loud and strange that it scared even himself. Ah! He could not forget those lovely birds, those fortunate birds, and as soon as he lost sight of them he dived right down to the bottom. When he came up again he seemed to be quite out of his mind. He did not know what the birds were called, or where they were flying to, yet he felt drawn more deeply to them than he had ever been to anything. He did not envy them at all. How could it possibly enter his mind to wish himself such loveliness? He would have been happy if the ducks could have just tolerated him – that poor, ugly creature.

The winter grew cold, so cold. The duckling had to swim round and round in the water to keep it from freezing completely, but every night the hole in which he swam became smaller and smaller. It froze so that the ice-crust creaked and the duckling had to use his legs all the time to prevent the water from icing over. Finally he became lifeless, lay very quiet and froze with the ice.

Early the next morning, a farmer passed by. He saw the duck, went out and broke up the ice with his wooden shoe. He carried the duck home to his wife, where it recovered.

The children wanted to play with him, but the duckling thought they meant to hurt him. In panic he flew right into the milk bowl so that the milk splashed out into the room. The wife shouted and raised her hands over her head, but then he flew into the tub where the butter was kept; then into the barrel of flour and out again. My goodness what a sight he was! The wife screamed and struck at him with the fire-tongs whilst the children were running around and falling over each other trying to catch the duckling. They laughed and they shouted. Fortunately the door was wide open, so he was able to rush out into the bushes and onto the newly-fallen snow – where he lay as if in hibernation.

It would be far too sad to tell you about all the want and misery he had to go through that harsh winter. – He was lying among the reeds in the marsh when the sun began to shine warmly again. The larks were singing – it was lovely spring.

All at once he stretched his wings.

They ruffled together and felt stronger than before, carrying him swiftly away. Before he realised it, he was in a great garden where the apple-trees stood in bloom and the lilacs dangled, sweet-scented on their long green boughs right down to the winding water in the canals. Ah! It was beautiful here in fresh spring. Right in front of him, out of the thicket, came three lovely white swans, ruffling their feathers and floating lightly on the water. The duckling recognised the magnificent birds and a strange sadness fell upon him.

"I will fly over to those majestic birds and I know they will kill me, because I – being so ugly have dared to come near them. Yet that doesn't matter. It is better to be killed by them than to be snapped at by the ducks, pecked by the hens, kicked by the girl who looks after the poultry-yard, and suffer through the winter!" So he flew out onto the water and swam towards the beautiful swans. They saw him, and came towards him with ruffled feathers.

---

<sup>13</sup> **They rose so high** – The original Danish text says, "*They rose so high, so high.*" Initially I had it twice, ...*so high, so high...*, but during the face-to-face proofreading I decided to skip the repetition for a couple of reasons.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

“Yes, kill me, kill me!” said the poor creature, bowing his head down towards the water, awaiting his death. But what did he see in the clear water? He saw his own reflection beneath him; he was no longer a clumsy, dark-grey, ugly unattractive bird – **he had become a swan!**

It doesn't matter if you were born in a duck-yard as long as you had been lying in a swan's egg!

He felt really happy at having gone through so much hardship and suffering. He could now appreciate his good fortune, appreciate all the loveliness that greeted him. The great swans swam around him and stroked him with their beaks.

Some little children came into the garden and threw bread and grain into the water, and the youngest shouted: “There is a new one.” The other children joined in joyfully, saying: “Yes, there is a new one.” They clapped and danced around, running after mum and dad.<sup>14</sup> While bread and cake were thrown into the water they all said: “The new one is the most beautiful of them all. He is so young and so beautiful.” Even the old swans bowed before him.

Then he felt quite shy and hid his head under his wings; he didn't know what to do with himself. He was much too happy, but not at all proud, because a good heart is never proud. He thought of the time when he had been persecuted and ridiculed, and now he heard them all saying he was the loveliest of all the lovely birds. The lilacs bowed their branches right down to the water next to him and the sun shone warm and welcoming. Then, he ruffled his feathers, raised his slender neck and with a heart full of joy he shouted:

**“I never dreamed of so much happiness, when I was the ugly duckling!”**

Written by Hans Christian Andersen (1843).

Translated from the original Danish into English by Benjamin Kurzweil (2008).

[This translation follows the number of exclamation marks that Hans Christian Andersen used so lavishly. If you prefer to read a version of [The Ugly Duckling with fewer exclamation marks, please click here.](#)]

**“It takes courage to have talent,”** wrote the Danish critic Georg Brandes in 1869 in his analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales and stories:

You have to dare to rely on your inspiration, you have to trust that the impulse that happens in your brain [mind] is healthy; that the style that feels natural for you – even if it is new – has its right to be and exist; you must have acquired boldness when being exposed and called impulsive and wild, before you can devote yourself to your instinct and follow it, wherever it leads you and whatever it offers you.

**Andersen had the courage to follow his instinct** despite the criticism that poured down on him in his early days in 1835, when he decided to use the fairytales as his artistic platform. But some friends did genuinely encourage Andersen, like the famous Danish physicist and chemist H C Ørsted (the discoverer of electromagnetism, in 1820).

Mr Ørsted told Andersen that the fairytales would make him successful and he advised his friend to continue walking down this road.

---

<sup>14</sup> **Mum and dad** – The original Danish text says “*far og mor*”; in English ‘dad and mum’. In English you mention the mum before the dad. Another example: In “The Story of a Mother”, it says: “three nights and days”, but in English you mention the days before the nights ‘three days and nights’. Even in Danish I find it better to say “*tre dage og nætter*” in the English order, because it gives a better flow.

## Short analysis of The Ugly Duckling

**The story of The Ugly Duckling can be divided into several scenes.** I will make a brief commentary on some of the scenes. The story starts with a *happy mood* opening scene, "It was so lovely out in the country". Do not forget to stress the 'so'. The story glides slowly from a *happy mood* scene to a *fun mood* scene from the sentence, "At last, one after another"; and drifts slowly from a *fun mood* to a *very funny* scene from the sentence, "Quack, quack, err, wha...wha – what's up, duck?" In this scene it becomes obvious that we are living in an environment that cannot accommodate someone that deviates from the norm. Notice that this scene is not only outside the duck-yard, but also before the egg has hatched. Even in this environment, the mother-duck is being told to get rid of the egg. Later inside the duck-yard, the mother-duck is being told the same by another old duck; the duck with Spanish blood and a red ribbon around her leg. Although life outside the duck-yard is being described as lovely, it is really no different than inside the duck-yard or in any other scene in the story. If you are different, then you will be pecked upon. Only together with the swans did the young swan find a group or community where it was welcomed.

**The young swan is mistakenly named duckling by everyone,** because it came together with a group of ducklings, so the other ducks perception of the young swan (cygnet) is that of a duckling. The young swan itself is not aware of its true identity, because of its negative social legacy. Only at the very end, it realises its true identity. The young swan did not have to do anything to become a swan, it was already a swan. It just had to grow. By being the pure being it was, it eventually became an adult swan. It was more a matter of a mental transformation.

**From the sentence, "So they went into the duck-yard,"** we enter into the *bully scenes* inside the duck-yard. Followed by the funny "*wild ducks*" scene; followed by the funny "*wild geese*" scene. You will notice that Andersen is constantly changing the dynamics throughout the story going from sad to fun and from funny scenes to sad scenes with short dialogs throughout the story. It keeps up the momentum.

**After the "*wild geese*" scene, you enter into a sad scene,** "It was late in the day", and "Towards evening". From this sad scene the story glides into *the funniest scene* of the story, "An old woman lived in the farmhouse"; the scene with the hen and cat. I have made a couple of footnotes regarding this scene (see the footnotes in the story).

**The lack of understanding is underlined in the scene** with the hen and the cat. What makes their narrow-mindedness so grotesque is the fact that a hen cannot understand a cat's nature and vice-versa. But the hen and the cat have decided that what they are doing is useful and correct. What is so contributory about to purring? Not much more than to float on water. You could say that the hen actually does contribute to something; she lays an egg every day. But the hen is not doing this by making an extra effort. It is a passive feminine act carried out by hens. Because the hen and the aristocratic cat cannot see any relevance in any aspect of the swan's nature, they are forcing the swan to change its nature into their nature. If the swan cannot change its nature, it is downgraded in the hierarchy and advised to keep quiet. The hen is clearly bullying the young swan. The reader/listener can see how impossible it is to ask a cygnet (a baby swan) to lay eggs or to purr. The behaviour of the hen and cat as more superior is something that we see everyday in countless situations and is not just something that happened in Andersen's life.

**From this funny scene the story glides into several small sad scenes,** starting with, "Eventually autumn came", going to "One evening there was a lovely sunset" and continuing with "The winter grew so cold, so cold". By now the reader/listener may think that the ugly duckling has frozen to death.

**Quickly Andersen changes the sad momentum into a funny scene,** "The children wanted to play with him". The next scene, "He was lying among the reeds in the marsh" is part of the *turning point* scene that comes right after. You will notice the way I read this scene like the calm before the storm. "All at once he stretched his wings". Now we have reached the *turning point* which ends with the peak of the story: "he had become a swan!" The rest of the scenes are joy and happiness. In the final scene the young swan looks back and remembers the time when it was persecuted and ridiculed. The fact that the young swan did not give up during its hardship throughout the story makes the joy that bit sweeter.

## The Story of a Mother

There sat a mother by her little child.

She was so sorrowful, so afraid that the child would die. It was very pale, its little eyes were closed, it drew breath slowly, and sometimes it breathed very deeply, as if it was sighing, and the mother looked even more sadly upon the little soul.

Then there was a knock at the door and a poor old man came in, wrapped in something that looked like a great horse-blanket; that keeps you warm, and he needed it, for it was a cold winter; everything outside was covered with snow and ice and the wind blew so that it cut one's face.

And as the old man shivered with cold and the little child slept for a moment, the mother put some beer in a pot on the stove to warm for him – and the old man sat and rocked; and the mother sat herself on a chair near him, watched her sick child that drew its breath so deeply, and raised its little hand.

“Don't you believe that I will keep him?” she said, “Our Lord will not take him from me!”

And the old man, who was Death himself, he nodded so strangely, it could just as well have meant “Yes” as “No”.

And the mother looked down at her child and tears rolled down her cheeks; her head became so heavy; for three days and for three nights, she had not closed her eyes, and now she slept, but only for a moment. Then she jumped up and shivered with cold “What was that!” she cried and looked all around, but the old man was gone, and her little child was gone, he had taken the child with him, and over in the corner the old grandfather clock whirred and whirred, the big heavy brass pendulum plummeted right down to the floor, bang! And then the clock stood still.

The poor mother rushed outside and cried for her child!

Out there in the middle of the snow sat a woman in long black garments, who said: “Death has been in your room I saw him rush away with your child. He walks faster than the wind and he never brings back what he has taken.”

“Please, just tell me which way he went,” said the mother, “Tell me the way and I will find him.”

“I know the way,” said the woman in the black garments, “but before I tell you, you have to sing for me all the songs that you have sung for your child. I love those songs, I have heard them before, I am Night and I saw your tears when you sang them!”

“I will sing them all; all of them” said the mother, “but do not stop me, so that I can catch him; so that I can find my child.”

But Night sat dumb and still. Then the mother wrung her hands, sang and wept, and there were many songs and even more tears; and then Night said: “Go to the right in the dark forest of fir trees that is where I saw Death make his way with your little child.”

Deep in the forest there was a crossroads and she no longer knew which way to go. There, there stood a thorn-bush with neither leaf nor flower upon it, for it was the cold winter time; only icicles hung on its branches.

“Have you seen Death pass by with my little child?”

“Yes” said the thorn-bush, “but I will not tell you which way he went unless you warm me up with your heart. I am freezing to death; I am turning to ice.”

And she pressed the thorn-bush firmly to her bosom, so that it could be properly warmed up. And the thorns pierced her skin, going deep into her flesh and her blood flowed in great streams. And the thorn-bush shot fresh green leaves and flowers bloomed on it in the cold winter's night; that's how warm it was next to the heart of a grieving mother! And the thorn-bush told her the way that she should go.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Then she came to a great lake on which there was neither ship nor boat. The lake was not frozen hard enough to bear her, nor sufficiently shallow for her to walk through. Yet she had to cross it; she had to find her little child. Then she laid herself down to drink the lake dry. This was impossible of course, but the sorrowful mother thought that perhaps a miracle would occur?

"No, it will never work out" said the lake, "it is better that we make a deal. I love collecting pearls, and your eyes are the two purest I have ever seen. If you will cry them out to me, then I shall carry you over to the great greenhouse where Death lives and where he looks after the flowers and trees; each of them is a human life."

"Oh, what would I not give to get to my child," said the weeping mother as she wept even more and her eyes sank down to the bottom of the lake and became two priceless pearls. Then the lake lifted her up as if she sat in a swing, lifting her in one movement to the other side of the shore, where there stood a strange house, many miles in length. One could not tell whether it was a mountain with forests and caves or if it had been built, but the poor mother couldn't see it, because she had cried her eyes out.

"Where shall I find Death, who went away with my little child?" she said.

"He hasn't arrived here yet" said the old woman caretaker who walked around to take care of Death's great greenhouse. "How could you have found your way here, and who has helped you?"

"Our Lord has helped me" she said, "He is merciful, and so will you be. How shall I find my little child?"

"Well, I don't know your child," said the old woman, "and you can't see! – Many flowers and trees have withered away tonight; Death will soon come and replant them. You probably know that every human has its tree of life or its flower according to how they are gifted. They look like other plants, but they have hearts that beat. Children's hearts also beat, so follow the sound and maybe you will recognise your child's heartbeat? Now, what will you give me for telling you what you should do next?"

"I have nothing to give" said the sad mother, "but I will go with you to the end of the world."

"Well, I have nothing to do there" said the old woman, "but you can give me your long, black hair. You probably know that it is beautiful - and I like it! You can have my white hair in return, that is something."

"Is that all you ask," she said "I will give it to you with pleasure!" So she gave the old woman her beautiful black hair and received the old woman's hair, white as snow, in return.

And then they went in to Death's great greenhouse where flowers and trees were growing strangely among each other. There stood fine hyacinths under glass bells, and there stood big strong peonies, there were water-plants growing there, some fresh, others sick, water-snakes were coiled upon them and black crabs were squeezing their stems. There stood lovely palm trees, oak trees and plane-trees, there stood parsley and flowering thyme. Each tree and each flower had a name and was the embodiment of a single human life. Those people were still living; in China, in Greenland, all around the world. There were large trees in small pots, standing so cramped that they were about to burst their pots. There were also quite a few places where small sad looking flowers were well cared for, flourishing in rich soil with moss all around. But the sorrowful mother bent over the smallest plants, listening to their human heartbeats; and somehow amongst those millions, she recognised her child's heartbeat.

"It is that one!" she shouted, stretching out her hand over a small blue crocus, whose sickly stem grew to one side.

"Don't touch the flower!" said the old woman, "but come and stand over here and when Death arrives – I expect him at any time – do not let him pull up that plant, but threaten him that if he pulls it up you will do the same with the other flowers and that will frighten him; he has to account for each one of them to Our Lord; no one dares to uproot them before He gives His permission.

All at once there was an icy cold rush through the hall, and the blind mother could feel that Death was arriving.

"How did you find your way here?" he asked. "How could you arrive here before me?"

"I am a mother!" she said.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Then Death stretched out his long hand towards the delicate little flower, but she held her hands tightly around it; so close and yet so afraid that she would touch one of its leaves. Then Death blew on her hands and she felt that his breath was colder than the cold wind and her hands fell down lifeless.

"You can't do anything to harm me," said Death.

"But Our Lord can!" she replied.

"I only do what he wants," said Death. "I am his gardener. I take all his flowers and trees and plant them out in the great garden of Paradise in the unknown land, but how they grow there and how it is there, I dare not tell you."

"Give me back my child!" wailed the mother as she cried and begged. Quickly, she took two beautiful nearby flowers in both her hands and shouted to Death: "I will tear all your flowers apart because I am in despair!"

"Don't touch them" said Death. "You say that you are unhappy, yet now you want to make another mother just as unhappy." "Another mother!" said the poor mother and immediately released both flowers.

"Here, please, take back your eyes," said Death, "I fished them up from the lake where they shone so brightly; I didn't know they were yours. Take them back; they are now clearer than ever before. Look down into the deep well over there. I shall tell you the names of the two flowers you wanted to uproot and you will see their whole future, their whole human life. You will see what you would disturb and destroy."

And she looked down into the well; and it was wonderful to see how one of them became a blessing for the world and to see how much happiness and joy surrounded it. And she saw the life of the other, which was nothing but sorrow and need, horror and misery.

"Both situations are the will of God" said Death.

"Which is the flower of misfortune and which is the blessed one?" she asked.

"That I will not tell you," said Death, "but this you will know from me. One of the visions in the well was of your own child. It was your child's destiny you saw; your own child's future."

Then the mother shouted out of fear: "Which of them was my child! Tell me! Save the innocent. Save my child from all that misery. Carry it away. Carry it into God's kingdom. Forget my tears, forget my prayers and forget everything I have said and done."

"I don't understand you" said Death. "Do you want your child back, or shall I walk with it into the place you do not know?"

Then the mother wrung her hands, fell on her knees and prayed to Our Lord. "Don't listen to me when I ask, against your will, which is the best. Don't listen to me! Don't listen to me!"

And she bowed her head down to her chest.

And Death walked away with her child into the unknown land.

Written by Hans Christian Andersen (1847).

Translated from the original Danish into English by Benjamin Kurzweil (2008).

[This translation follows the number of exclamation marks that Hans Christian Andersen used so lavishly. If you prefer to read a version of [The Story of a Mother with fewer exclamation marks, please click here.](#)]

## The Butterfly

The butterfly wanted to have a sweetheart.

Of course, he wanted to have a nice little one of the flowers. He looked at them; each sat so quietly and modestly on her stalk, as a lady<sup>15</sup> should sit when she is not engaged, but there were so many to choose from that it became a difficulty. The butterfly couldn't be bothered to spend more time on it, so he flew over to the daisy.

They call her French Margaret. They know that she can tell fortunes, which she does while lovers pick off her petals one by one. As each petal falls they say something about their sweetheart, such as "She loves me", "She loves me not", "She loves me a lot", "She loves me just a bit" or something like that. Everyone asks in his own language. The butterfly also came to ask, but he didn't pluck off the petals, he kissed each of them in turn, with the intention that you get further with kindness.

"Sweet Margaret daisy," he said, "you are the wisest Madame<sup>16</sup> of all the flowers; you can tell fortunes. Tell me whether I will get this one or that one? Tell me who I will get? When I know it, I can fly straight to her and propose."

But Margaret didn't answer at all. She didn't like that he called her a married woman, because she was a young lady, and a young lady is not a 'Mrs', but a 'Miss'. He asked her for a second time and he asked her for a third time, but when he couldn't get a single word out of her, he couldn't be bothered asking anymore, but flew straight on towards making a proposal.

It was early spring; there were lots of snowdrops and crocuses. "They're very pretty" said the butterfly, "nice little candidates ready for their confirmation, and too young."<sup>17</sup> Like all other young men, he was looking for older girls. Then he flew away to the anemones, which he found a little bitter; the violets were somewhat too romantic; the tulips too showy; the daffodils too middle-class; the lime blossoms too small and with far too many relatives. The apple blossoms certainly looked like roses, but they were here today and gone tomorrow according to which way the wind blew; he felt it would become too short a marriage. The sweet pea was the one he liked the best. She was red and white, very delicate and refined; she was the type of domestic girl who is both good looking and good in the kitchen. He was just about to propose to her, when suddenly he saw next to him a pea-pod with a dead flower on its head.<sup>18</sup> "Who is that?" he asked. "It is my sister," said the sweet pea. "So, that's how you are going to look like later!" It frightened butterfly, and then he flew away.

The honeysuckles were hanging over the fence. There were lots of these lasses, long in the face and yellow of skin; he didn't like this type. So, what sort did he like? Who knows!

Spring passed, summer came and went, and then it was autumn. He was still no closer. And all the flowers now came in their loveliest clothes, but what was the good of that? Here was not the fresh fragrance of a youthful mind. Fragrance is exactly what heart needs when it gets older, and there isn't so much fragrance in dahlias and hollyhocks. Then the butterfly found himself flying down to the curled mint.

"She hasn't any blossom, but she is a whole flower in herself, scented from root to tip and with fragrance in every leaf. She's the one I will choose."

And so at last he proposed.

---

<sup>15</sup> **Lady** – The Danish use the word "jomfru", which literally means "virgin" in English. But virgin would sound odd.

<sup>16</sup> **Madame** – All English translations write "you are the wisest woman". This is an incorrect and misleading translation of the meaning. The Danish text says "kone", which means a married woman. It would have been appropriate to translate it to "you are the wisest wife". The English word "wife" is the exact meaning of the Danish word "kone"; today the Danes would rather say "hustru" instead of "kone". I have translated it differently, using the English word Madam, which is the title for a married woman for a British national, but by using the slightly different Madame, which is the title for a married woman for a French national, I am playing on the "French Margaret"; also increasing the level of variation in the text when saying 'wife': 'Madame', 'a married woman' and 'Mrs'; three different ways of expressing the same.

<sup>17</sup> **Young** - The Danish text says "but quite fresh". The word 'fresh' has a different meaning in English in this context.

<sup>18</sup> **Dead/head** - The Danish text says "en *vissen* blomst på *spidsen*", literally "a *withered* flower on its *tip*". There is also a pun in it, 'vissen' and 'spidsen'. I have kept the pun by saying: "a *dead* flower on its *head*."

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

But the mint stood stiff and still. Finally she said “Friendship, but nothing more, please. I am old and you are old – we could quite well live with each other, but marry - no! Let us not make fools of ourselves at our advanced age.”

And so the butterfly got no one. He had searched for too long and that is not good. The butterfly became a bachelor.

It was late in the autumn, raining and blustery; the wind blew cold down the backs of the old willow trees so that they creaked and groaned. It wasn't good to fly outside in summer clothes; then he would 'catch his death', as they say.<sup>19</sup> But the butterfly didn't fly outside; he happened to come inside, where there was fire in the fireplace, yes proper summertime warmth. He could live, but “Just living is not enough,” he said, “sunshine, freedom and a little flower is what one must have!”

So he flew against the window pane, and was seen, admired and stuck on a pin in a collection of curios. They couldn't do more for him. “Now I also sit on a stalk, just like the flower” said the butterfly, “I can't say it is great feeling. It is probably like being married, you are pinned!” and so he comforted himself.

“It is a poor comfort” said the pot-plants in the sitting room.

“Pot-plants can't be trusted,” thought the butterfly, “they spend too much time with humans.”<sup>20</sup>

Written by Hans Christian Andersen.

Translated from the original Danish into English by Benjamin Kurzweil.

---

<sup>19</sup> ‘catch his death’ - Andersen wrote, in Danish, “*da ville man få kærligheden at føle, som man siger*”. Literally translated into English, this is “then you would feel the love, as they say.” To ‘feel the love’ is a Danish expression full of irony, meaning the exact opposite of its literal sense, something like, “you are going to feel the heat”; it seems there is no exact counterpart for the expression in English. My expert proof-reader wrote to me saying, “We cannot think of an English term that would convey the irony of the original Danish. In English, we often say that if a man goes out in bad weather he will ‘catch his death’. While this is not an ironic thing to say, I believe it is the closest thing to the ‘equivalent term’ you are looking for.”

<sup>20</sup> **Pot-plants** – Pot-plants are not used to living outside, they are not used to freedom, hence their opinion is not trustworthy when speaking on issues about freedom, which is what the butterfly is all about; I think that is the idea behind it.

## The Emperor's New Clothes



Original illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen

In Hans Christian Andersen's own commentary to the 1862 edition of "Fairytale and Stories" Andersen writes, "*The Emperor's New Clothes is of Spanish origin.*"

Andersen mentions Prince Don Juan Manuel as the author to whom he is indebted for the idea.

Prince Juan Manuel was a nephew of King Alfonso X of Castile, and son of Don Pedro Manuel, Lord of Villena; a brother of King Alfonso X, nicknamed Alfonso the Wise. His mother was Beatrice of Savoy.

Don Juan Manuel, Prince of Villena (1282 – 1348) was a Spanish prince often engaged in wars against the Moors; the Moors were Muslims from the Maghreb countries in North Africa and Andalusia in Spain.

But it was not the wars he became known for – he became known after his death for his collection of Spanish tales, *El Conde Lucanor*.

*Tales of Count Lucanor* (1328 – 1335) is a collection of 50 short stories based on Greek Aesop, Indian Panchatantra, Persian tales and tales from Jewish and Arabic literature. Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* is a remake of tale 7 in *Tales of Count Lucanor* that has the title "Of that which happened to a King and three Impostors".

When comparing Prince Don Juan Manuel's version with Andersen's version, it becomes clear that Andersen's remake has a much stronger narrative style and much stronger humour – superior to Prince Don Juan Manuel's version. Although Andersen took virtually the whole plot from Prince Don Juan Manuel's version, Andersen clearly perfected the story in every way.

The stories in *Tales of Count Lucanor* are kicked off through a dialog between Count Lucanor and his adviser Patronio; Count Lucanor asks a question, where upon Patronio gives him the answer by telling Count Lucanor a story. Prince Don Juan Manuel concludes the story with a short verse (a song) condensing the moral of the story into a short, concrete statement – a moral style similar to that of Aesop's Fables.

Prince Juan Manuel prided himself mostly with his battles and victories, and barely made a mention of his authorship, because he didn't regard it as being noble - it would indicate that he had time to engage in something that during the European Middle Ages was considered for the lower classes.

When Prince Don Juan Manuel had finished his *Tales of Count Lucanor*, he gave the complete handwritten manuscript to the monks of Peñafiel in the province of Valladolid in Spain – hundred years before the invention of printing – so that they could give it to the generations to come, ***who would regard the arts of peace nobler than the arts of war.***

*El Conde Lucanor* first found its way into print in 1575, when it was published in Seville. It was again printed in Madrid in 1642, and then it was forgotten for nearly two hundred years. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was reprinted again, in a contemporary translation – a German version printed in Stuttgart in 1839, a French version printed in Paris in 1840, and a Spanish version printed in Barcelona in 1853.

Hans Christian Andersen did not know the Spanish work *El Conde Lucanor*, but he had read one of the stories – *Of that which happened to a King and three Impostors* – in a German translation entitled 'So ist der Lauf der Welt'; in English, "That's the way of the world".

The Emperor's New Clothes was published the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1837 in Copenhagen in Danish, and translated from the original Danish into an up-to-date English version by Benjamin Kurzweil in 2009. **Enjoy!**

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

### Introduction

The original medieval Spanish tale is about a king and three fraudsters that call themselves the best weavers and tailors in the world, and now they want to sew clothes to the King of Castalia, in order to make good money.

The clothes are so subtle and of such a fantastic quality that only the person, who is son of his presumed father, can see it, whereas anyone that says to be his father's son, but is not, will not be able to see the clothes. All the courts men and ministers, who fear for not being their father's son, therefore praise the invisible clothes, but at the end the fraud is revealed.

It is not revealed by a nice little, sharp boy - as described in Andersen's tale - but by a black African, who rubs his eyes and thereafter walks directly to the king's procession. In front of the king - who is sitting on a horse - the black African says boldly, "Your Majesty, I have never had the honour to know my father, and actually I can't be bothered to know who he is. That is why I dare telling you - right up in your face - that you are riding completely naked through the capital city!"

## The Emperor's New Clothes

Many years ago there lived an emperor, who was so tremendously fond of beautiful new clothes, that he spent all his money on being dressed up properly.

He wasn't interested in his soldiers, wasn't interested in comedy or driving in the forest, unless it gave him the opportunity to show off his new clothes.

He had a dress for every hour of the day, and just as people say of a king that he is in the council chambers, here they always said, "The emperor is in the closet."

In the big city where he lived, so much fun was going on - every day lots of strangers were arriving.

One day two fraudsters arrived. They pretended to be weavers and said that they knew how to weave the most beautiful clothes that you could ever imagine. Not only were the colours and patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but the clothes that were sewed from this material had the peculiarity of being invisible to anyone who was unfit for his position or was hopelessly stupid.

"Such clothes must be wonderful to have," thought the emperor. "By wearing such clothes, I could find out which men in my empire are unfit for the positions they have been appointed to; I would be able to tell the clever from the stupid! Yes, such clothes must be woven to me at once." And he gave the two fraudsters lots of money up front, so that they could start their work straight away.

They set up two looms, pretended that they were working, but there was nothing at all on the looms. They boldly demanded the finest silk and the purest gold, which they stuffed into their own bag, and worked on the empty looms until late night.

"Well, now I wonder how far they have come with my clothes," thought the emperor, but he felt a bit strange when thinking of the person who was hopelessly stupid or unfit for his position, could not see it. Well, he thought that he didn't have to be afraid of that, but he preferred to send someone else to be the first to inspect it.

Everyone in the city knew what special powers the clothes had and everyone was keen to see how incompetent or stupid his neighbour was.

"I will send my honest old minister to the weavers," thought the emperor. "He is the best one to see how the clothes looks like, because he is intelligent and no one is doing his job better than him!"

The good-natured old minister entered the hall where the two fraudsters sat and worked at the empty looms. "My goodness!" thought the old minister and opened his eyes wide, "I can't see a thing!" But he didn't say that.

Both the fraudsters asked him if he could be so kind to step closer, and asked if the pattern wasn't beautiful and the colours lovely. Then they pointed at the empty looms, and the poor old minister continued opening his eyes wide - but he couldn't see a thing, because there was nothing. "Oh, good Lord," he thought, "should I be stupid? That I never thought about myself, and nobody must know about it! Am I not competent? No, it is not an option for me to say that I can't see the clothes."

"Well, you are not saying anything about it," said the one that weaved. "Oh, it is pretty, very lovely," said the old minister and looked through his glasses. "The pattern and the colours! Yes, I shall tell the emperor that it really pleases me."

"Well, we are happy to hear that," said both the weavers, and then they mentioned the name of the colours, and the special pattern. The old minister listened carefully so as to be able to repeat it when he came back to the emperor. And that was what he did.

The fraudsters demanded more money, more silk and gold - they needed it for their weaving. They stuffed everything into their own pockets. Not a thread was put on the loom, but they kept going on as before - to weave at the empty loom.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Soon after, the emperor sent another honest official to see how the weaving was going, and if the clothes would soon be finished. The same thing happened to him as to the minister - he looked and looked but as nothing was there but the empty looms, he could not see a thing. "Well, isn't it a beautiful piece of work?" said the two fraudsters and showed and explained the beautiful pattern that wasn't there at all.

"I'm not stupid," thought the man. "So it is my good position I am not fit for? That is quite funny. But one should not be affected by it." And then he praised the cloth that he could not see and assured them how happy he was with the beautiful colours and lovely pattern. "Yes, it is definitely the best," he told the emperor.

Everyone in town was talking about the magnificent cloth. Then the emperor wanted to see it for himself, while it was still on the loom.

With a great entourage of carefully selected men, among them the two old honest officials, who had been there before, he went over to the two smart fraudsters, who were now weaving with all their might, but without yarn or thread.

"Yes, isn't it magnificent?" said both of the honest officials. "Would Your Majesty please take a look? What a pattern? What colours?" And then they pointed at the empty loom, because they thought that the others could probably see the cloth.

"What on earth!" the emperor thought, "I don't see a thing! This is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be the emperor? This is the most horrible thing that could happen to me!" "Oh, it is very beautiful," said the emperor, "it has my greatest approval," and he nodded contentedly and regarded the empty loom - he didn't want to say that he couldn't see a thing.

The entire entourage he had with him, looked and looked, but they didn't get more out of it than all the others, yet, they all said like the emperor, "Oh, it is very beautiful!" and they advised him to wear these splendid new clothes for the first time during the big parade that was soon to happen. "It is magnificent; pretty; excellent!" they said person to person, and they were all so incredibly pleased with it. The emperor gave each of the fraudsters a Knight's Cross to hang from his button hole, and the title of Imperial Weaver.

The fraudsters stayed up the whole night, with more than sixteen candles burning, before that morning when the procession was to take place - people could see that they were busy finishing the emperor's new clothes. They pretended to take the clothes off the loom, they cut the air with big scissors, they sewed with a needle without thread, and when they had finished, they said, "Look, now the clothes are done!"

The emperor, together with his finest knights-awarded men, went over to see it himself, and when they entered the room, both fraudsters held one arm up as if they were holding something, and said, "Look, here is the trousers, here is the robe,<sup>21</sup> here is the mantle,<sup>22</sup> and so they continued. "It is as light as spider web! You would think you had nothing on your body, but that's exactly the beauty of it." "Yes," said all the honourable men, but they couldn't see a thing, because there was nothing to see.

"Now, will Your Imperial Majesty most graciously, please take off your clothes?" said the fraudsters, "then we shall dress you with the new ones, over there, in front of the big mirror."

The emperor took off all his clothes, and the fraudsters behaved as if they were handing him each piece of the new that supposed to have been sewn, and they put their arms around his waist, as if attaching something – it was his train – and the emperor turned and twisted in front of the mirror. "Goodness, how well it suits! How lovely it fits!" they all said. "What a pattern! What colours! It must be worth a fortune!"

–

"Outside they are waiting with the canopy that will be raised above His Majesty for the procession," said the Chief Master of Ceremonies.

---

<sup>21</sup> **Robe** – referring to a long garment, a kind of priestly garment.

<sup>22</sup> **Mantle** – referring to a short garment outside the robe, on the back of the person.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

"Yes, I am done," said the emperor. "Doesn't it fit well?" And then he turned once more in front of the mirror, just to make it look that he was examining his best suit properly.

The Chamberlains, who were to carry the train, were moving their hands above the floor as if they were picking up the train, but they were just holding on to air, because they dared not let anyone notice that they could not see anything.

And then the emperor walked in the procession under the lovely canopy, and all the people in the streets and in the windows said, "Goodness, how the emperor's new clothes are unique! What a lovely train he has on his coat! How well it fits!" Nobody dared to let anyone notice that they could not see anything, because that would have meant that you were not fit for your position or hopelessly stupid.

None of the other clothes in the emperor's closet had ever been such a success.

"But he hasn't got anything on!" said a little child. "Good Lord, listen to the voice of the innocent," said the father, and people whispered to one another, what the child had said, "He hasn't got anything on, a little child says, he hasn't got anything on!" "He hasn't got anything on," shouted all the people together.

And the emperor felt most uncomfortable, for it seemed to him, that the people were right. But he thought to himself, "I must carry on until the end of the procession." And he walked even prouder than before,<sup>23</sup> and the Chamberlains walked along carrying the train - that wasn't there at all.

Story written by Hans Christian Andersen (1837).

Translated from the original Danish version by Benjamin Kurzweil in 2009. Unabridged version.

(Probably the best English translation in the world of "The Emperor's New Clothes")

[This translation follows the number of exclamation marks that Hans Christian Andersen used so lavishly. If you prefer to read a version of [The Emperor's New Clothes with fewer exclamation marks, please click here.](#)]

---

<sup>23</sup> **Walked even prouder** – In the original Danish manuscript text, it says, '*He stood prouder*' or 'he was holding himself prouder', referring to a bodily position and attitude. I decided to use '*walked*', in order to make sense of what the chamberlains are doing, also walking behind him, '*the Chamberlains walked along*'. I am aware that variation is good, but if it suppresses the clarity and consistency, it is better not to use variation.

## Prelude to Mankind, Kind man

The story "*Mankind, Kind man*" is a short story written by Benjamin Kurzweil - it takes 45 minutes to read.



Jaffa Gate - "David's Gate"

### Prelude to the historical fiction

**Around 2000 years ago lived a person, who could shed light on the DNA of our culture.**

Did Jesus learn his teachings from the Jews in Galilee?

Was Jesus influenced by the Jews at that time?

This historical fiction will give you the answer to many of these questions.

The plot is about the Jewish peasant Akiva, who held back his anger to his employer, although he was entitled to be upset after working for three years, still not receiving his wages.

### Interfaith context



**The Muslims call this behaviour** the attribute of *al-Haleem*, when you hold back your anger, when you are entitled to be upset.

**The Chinese call this** *the attuned ear*. Once you have a thorough understanding of the will of Heaven, and a great inner strength of purpose, you will reach the state Confucius described as *having an attuned ear*. You will have attained the greatest possible ability to respect others, you can understand the argument behind the issue, you can listen to all kinds of voices with an open mind, and put yourself in other people's shoes; you understand why they say the way they do.

**The Hindus (Bharatiyas) call this** *Karma-Yoga*, being above duality and the fruits of your actions. This enables you to listen and understand other people, developing empathy.

**The Jews call this** *the behaviour of Rabbi Akiva*.

Extract from the short story:

*Hurkanos shouted as loud as he could, "Akiva, what is the purpose of mankind?"*

***And the mountains of Galilee echoed back<sup>24</sup> – Kind man, kind man, kind man.....***

<sup>24</sup> **Echoed back.** When the words of an echo are reflected back, it can sometimes seem that the words return in reverse order. This phenomenon can be simulated by simply speaking the word 'mankind' rapidly and repeatedly. After a few times you suddenly realise that it sounds like you are saying 'kind man'. The echo creates a similar audio experience, suggesting that Mother Nature is speaking to you; giving you the answer.

## CONTENTS

### **Mankind, Kind man**

A three-part historical fiction in eleven chapters

#### **Part one:**

**The British Museum** Page 26

#### **Part two:**

**The Story Begins** Page 27

**Arrival in Jerusalem** Page 29

**Three years passed** Page 29

**The wealthy Hurkanos visits Akiva in Galilee** Page 30

**And the mountains of Galilee echoed back...** Page 32

**Jerusalem of Gold** Page 33

**The glass diamond** Page 34

**The prophecy** Page 36

**Akiva embraced Rifka and blessed her** Page 38

#### **Part three:**

**Back in the British Museum** Page 39

## Chapter 1: The British Museum

### Prelude

Joe Blumenthal had bought himself a special television device that could show the story of great people who had walked on this Earth since time immemorial.

The device was shaped like a globe, with countries and the seven seas printed on it.

The person using the device had to spin the globe and, like roulette that stops at a particular number, the globe would stop at a certain country. Based on its artificial intelligence, the device would decide which great person from that particular country and of that particular generation it should portray.

If the person lived in a different time-period than that of today, the map on the globe would adjust accordingly, displaying a map of the period of the story being told. Inside the globe was the television screen; when the story began, the globe would open up and the special screen would pop-up.

### Christmas time

It was Christmas time, and Joe Blumenthal had come all the way from the United States to visit his friend Chris Johnson in London. Joe had brought the special television with him to show it to his friend. For sure, Chris would love to watch this device.

The mobile phone rang when Joe was sitting in the hotel lobby.

Chris was on the line.

“Hello Joe, how are you?”

“Fine,” answered Joe, “the journey was easy and now I am sitting in the hotel lobby waiting for you to pick me up.”

Full of excitement, Chris said, “Joe, I have something I want to show you before we celebrate my birthday tonight. We still have seven hours before the guests arrive, and we could easily visit the new *‘Futurist’ collection* at the British Museum in central London.”

“Sounds good to me,” Joe answered.

### At the British Museum

At the British Museum, lots of people were looking at the *‘Futurist’ collection*. Joe and Chris walked around looking at this new collection and, while they walked, Chris went to the delivery desk and asked a question of a staff member. Joe stood next to Chris, placing the device at the delivery desk. When Chris had finished his conversation with the assistant, he and Joe continued viewing the collection, forgetting the device.

One of the security staff noticed this ‘globe-shaped’ item and took it to ‘lost and found’. A few minutes later, an arts assistant who was working on a different project called the *‘Mixed Antique’* collection, waited for a package that looked rather like the ‘globe-shaped’ item. She mistakenly took this special television device into the closed area of the *‘Mixed Antique’* collection.

### The *‘Mixed Antique’* collection

In the *‘Mixed Antique’* collection room there were items from many cultures and different periods, going back to the time of Moses and into the time of the first temple of King Solomon in Jerusalem.

There were statues of the Greek philosophers, Roman gladiators and senators, Chinese Emperor’s and soldiers, Arab conquerors and Christian crusaders.

There was a carved wooden statue from Africa, with many faces and special patterns; there was fine jewellery from India and a statue of an Indian swami with an orange dhoti.

I could go on and on, for the whole room was filled with antique items.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

The statue of the Indian swami looked at the television device; sensing something human about it, he began to speak. "What is it you can do?" he asked. "I am a television device with human intelligence<sup>25</sup> and I can show you the lives of great people who have walked the Earth," answered the device.

"Really?" said the swami, "Show me one of these great people."

"You have to spin me first, so that no one can say that I have cheated," replied the globe.

And so the swami turned and turned the globe until it was spinning with great speed. Eventually it stopped at the land of Israel, and the map now changed to the borders that existed 2000 years ago. The globe opened and the television screen emerged; just like 'Google Earth'<sup>26</sup> it zoomed in on Israel and then swung towards the region of upper Galilee.

"That must be the story of Jesus," thought most of the statues in the room.

And now the story begins.

## Chapter 2: The Story Begins

A Jewish peasant from upper Galilee had lost all his possessions to the Romans.

His dignity didn't allow him to beg, so he told his wife that he would head off toward Jerusalem to try his luck. He kissed his wife and his son Joshua, and went down the hills of Galilee with his simple cart being pulled by a tired old donkey.

Passing Nazareth on his way, he made a stop to get some water for the donkey.

### The Meditators

He rested near a cave, where he noticed some men having a conversation. These men from the cave were Meditators.

A sage was standing in front of the men and he asked if he could join them in their meditation. The most senior among the Meditators said, "My dear son. Blessed are you to God. Your intentions are good, but please tell me, have you truly acquired stoicism or have you not?"

The sage answered with a question, "Master, will you please explain your words?"

The Meditator asked, "If one man is praising you and another man is insulting you are the two equal in your eyes or are they not?"

The sage answered, "No master, they are not equal to me. I have pleasure from those who praise me and pain from those who degrade me, but I do not take revenge or bear a grudge."

The Meditator advised, "Go in peace my son. You have not acquired stoicism. You have not reached a level where your soul feels neither the praise of one who honours you nor the degradation of one who insults you. You have not prepared your thoughts to merge at a level that would enable you to meditate with us. Go and increase the humbleness of your heart and learn to treat everything equally until you have become stoical. Only then will you be able to meditate with us."

The sage left the Meditators and passed by the peasant, who asked politely "in which direction are you going?" When the sage answered, "I am going towards Jerusalem," the peasant replied, "please let me join you and share your company until we arrive in Jerusalem."

---

<sup>25</sup> **Human intelligence** – From the device's point of view its intelligence is human; but that is what is being disputed later in the story.

<sup>26</sup> '**Google Earth**' – 'Google Earth' is a software application from Google (2008).

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

### **A wise conversation on a donkey cart**

While they were travelling together on the cart, the peasant spoke with the sage. "I heard some of the conversation you had with the Meditators, and I was thinking, '*is it not easy for someone who lives in a cave and has no possessions, to ask someone who is married and has possessions to treat everything equally?*'"

The sage answered, "Maybe there is a level we do not understand yet, or maybe they have misunderstood something."

"I think these people are extremists," said the peasant.

"Perhaps you are right," answered the sage, who then recalled an incident with a great Torah sage. "Many would say that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was on a great level; he wrote the Zohar, yet after twelve years of meditation in a cave in Galilee, he reacted very negatively upon leaving the cave when he saw a farmer ploughing his field.

Rabbi Shimon shouted at the farmer "People give up their eternity to waste their time with nothing!" The farmer was hurt by the words of Rabbi Shimon. Then a voice from Heaven came down and said to the Rabbi, "Listen to me, did you come out from the cave to destroy my world! If so you'd better go back to the cave; there you can keep to your own higher standards!"

The peasant was quiet and thought to himself, '*It sounds like Rabbi Shimon would attain his level by refraining from this world, by not participating in worldly matters.*' So he asked the sage "Is there not a way to achieve this level yet still participate in this world; still do one's worldly duty?"

"Yes, there is such a way," answered the sage, "and maybe King Solomon combined the two, but it requires good judgement. The Rabbis did not find that King Solomon had demonstrated good judgement, because he had too much money and too many women - some Rabbis even wanted to write King Solomon out of the Torah!

However, the people of Israel loved King Solomon, so it did not happen.

Maybe King Solomon tried to merge the physical with the spiritual at a grand scale, living his life to the fullest.

Ah! King Solomon. He didn't stop himself and must have travelled here in Galilee - where else would he get the inspiration for the 'Song of Songs'?

The Song of Songs, *Shir HaShirim*, spring time, when the mind is full of excitement, as it is in youth, when you think you can conquer the world.

When you become older; Proverbs - when the mind is more thoughtful and you are half way through, it becomes harvest time.

And when do we sing the book of Ecclesiastes, the book of *Kohelel*? When the season is over; when you look back on your life, and when you say 'How much nonsense did I do?' Oh! *Shlomo HaMelech*, King Solomon."

### **The wisdom of Nachum Gamzu**

The peasant said, "Our friend Nachum Gamzu says that everything is for the good. He doesn't say 'this is emptiness' or 'that is emptiness', like King Solomon. He looks at everything, and whatever happens, he says, '*also this is for the good.*'"

The sage smiled and said, "Maybe King Solomon is referring to his over-indulgence in wealth and his over-indulgence with women; he discovered that it did not bring him happiness, just emptiness. It was his indulgences in various things that failed to bring him real happiness.

Had King Solomon lived in a cave, like a simple man, and then said that great material wealth did not bring him happiness, nobody would have believed him. People would have said that he held this view because he never really tasted life properly.

But King Solomon had tasted life; he tasted it to the fullest."

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

The sage became curious. "You said that you know the great Rabbi Nachum Gamzu?"

"Yes," answered the peasant. "Actually it is my wife who knows Nachum Gamzu; she invites him for the Shabbat once in a while."

"Do you study Torah with him?" asked the sage being positively surprised.

"No," answered the peasant, looking in the other direction through embarrassment.

"You should do that," said the sage, "Nachum Gamzu is a very special person, unlike the other rabbis."

"I can't read Hebrew!" replied the peasant sadly.

"Of course you can read Hebrew" said the sage, "you just have to say to yourself that you can."

"My son Joshua is teaching me the Hebrew alphabet," answered the peasant.

The sage looked into the eyes of his travelling companion. "Listen my son, you are asking relevant questions, you have good reasoning, and I can see that you have a good character. It is not a problem for you to learn how to read and write."

### **They reached Jerusalem**

After a couple of days, they reached Jerusalem. The sage thanked the peasant for his free ride and blessed him, wishing him good judgement on his further journey.

## **Chapter 3: Arrival in Jerusalem**

The peasant started to look for work, and after a few hours he was successful in finding a job working for a wealthy farmer, although it paid very low wages.

Regardless of the poor conditions, the peasant worked hard and dutifully from morning to evening.

The wealthy farmer noticed that the peasant worked well on his farmland and fulfilled his duties without complaining - he was very pleased with his new employee.

Three years passed.

## **Chapter 4: Three years passed**

Three years passed.

By now, the peasant had accumulated a nice sum of money that was due for payment. He felt that it was time to go home and did not want to renew his contract with the farmer because he had not seen his family for three years.

The peasant waited to ask for his payment until right after the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashana*; then he requested his nice sum of money.

"Yes, it is true what you are saying," said the wealthy Jerusalemite farmer. "It is true that I owe you three years of wages, but I have no money at all."

The peasant from Galilee did not raise any objections to his employer; he simply asked: "If you do not have any money, can you not instead give me a share in your harvest as payment?"

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

“No, I am not able to give you a share in my harvest,” answered the wealthy farmer, although they both knew that the orchards were packed with ripe fruit ready to be harvested.

“Then please give me a plot of land that has the value of my wages.”

“I do not have a plot of land that I can give you,” answered the wealthy landowner, who possessed land as far as the eye could see.

“I am willing to accept animals. Please give me sheep or cattle.”

“No, I do not have any animals that I can give you,” answered the wealthy farmer.

With full confidence in the authenticity of his employer, the peasant continued asking, “You have bedding in your house, please give me some of your bedding.”

“I do not have any bedding that I can give,” answered the wealthy home owner.

The peasant from upper Galilee looked around and saw that everything was in perfect order, the way it used to be - there was no sign of poverty. But he did not say a word and decided to return home having thanked the farmer for the three years of his employment.

With a heavy heart he returned home to his family and explained everything to his wife. His wife reacted very calmly and said ‘*gam zu la tova*’, meaning ‘this is also for the good’.<sup>27</sup> She was quoting the great sage, Nachum Gamzu, who lived a few kilometres away from them.

The Jewish High Holiday *Yom Kippur* had passed, and the peasant was in great financial trouble. He had no other choice but to borrow money for the next Jewish High Holiday that was approaching; the holiday, for which one builds a small hut in which to sit - *Succoth*.

But, regardless of the situation, the peasant and his wife celebrated *Succoth* full of joy.

## Chapter 5: The wealthy Hurkanos visits Akiva in Galilee

After *Succoth* an unexpected guest appeared outside their small home. It was his former employer.

The peasant was sleeping when his wife woke him.

“Akiva, Akiva, there is a man outside our door with three donkeys fully loaded with food, wine and clothing. He says he wants to speak with you. He says his name is Hurkanos the senior. Do you know him?”

“Hurkanos!” shouted the peasant and almost jumped from his bed.

The peasant welcomed Hurkanos and prepared a hearty meal in honour of his guest and former employer.

After the meal, the guest said he had a gift to his former employee. A great leather bag full of silver coins was laid in front of the peasant.

Akiva was so surprised and looked at Hurkanos for an explanation.

“Everything I have brought with me is as a sign of my appreciation of the pleasant peasant you have been. The bag of silver coins is your three years of wages – not a penny is missing.”

Hurkanos took out an envelope from another bag and handed it to the peasant.

---

<sup>27</sup> ‘**gam zu la tova**’ – The correct spelling and pronunciation is ‘gam zu le tova’ or “l'tova”. I find that ‘la tova’ has a better flow, although it is the incorrect way. In modern Hebrew you would pronounce it, “gam ze le tova”.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

"I have also written a great recommendation in your name Akiva Ben Joseph. If you are looking for work at my rich neighbour Kalba Savua, you might get a job. I know he is looking for a leader of the shepherds to manage all his flocks. Kalba Savua pays well."

"I have one more gift to you," said Hurkanos. "Actually it is a gift to your wife."

Then he took out two gift boxes; there was a crown in one of them and a polished diamond in the other.

"I would advise you to go to a goldsmith; ask him to attach the diamond to the crown, making it into a *Jerusalem of Gold*."

Hurkanos gave Akiva a few gold coins for the cost of the goldsmith's work. Akiva thanked Hurkanos from the bottom of his heart.

Now, Hurkanos looked at Akiva for an explanation. "Please tell me, my good man, did you not notice that I was pushed into debt? Did you not think that I was trying to run away from my responsibility?"

"No, not at all," answered Akiva, "I thought that you had been given a good offer and that you had to use all your cash."

"And when I said that I did not have any animals, what did you think then?" asked Hurkanos.

"I thought that you probably had leased your animals and that they had not yet been returned."

"And what did you think when I said that I could not give you a plot of land?"

"I thought that you probably had leased your land, which meant it was technically not yours to give," answered Akiva.

"When I said that I did not have fruit to give, then you must really have suspected that I was trying to swindle you," said Hurkanos.

"Not at all," answered Akiva, "I was absolutely sure that you had not taken the '*Ma'ase*' of the fruit. We are not allowed to eat the fruit until you have done this separation of ten percent of the harvest, designated for the priests, the *Kohanim*."

"And when I declined to give you bedding, what did you think then? Did you not think that I was trying to avoid the issue with poor excuses?"

"No, I did not even question you in this matter," said Akiva. "I thought that you had given all your property to the temple in Jerusalem, the so called *Kabed Habait*, and so did not even have your own bedding."

Hurkanos was positively surprised to hear the answers that Akiva gave him. "You are absolutely right," said Hurkanos, "I did actually give all my property and possessions to the temple in Jerusalem, because I was very disappointed with my son Eliezer. He wanted to study Torah instead of taking care of the farm, so I decided that he should not inherit my possessions. I later regretted that action and went back to the sages who released me from my oath, making it possible to return the property to me."

Hurkanos looked at Akiva Ben Joseph and, from the bottom of his heart he said,

**"Just as you judged me favourably, The Heavenly Court will also judge you favourably."**

## Chapter 6: And the mountains of Galilee echoed back...

Hurkanos walked outside the house, where there stood two servants with a wagon and horses ready to depart.

Akiva stood next to his wife outside his home, watching Hurkanos travelling down through the valley - the valley that held the fragrance of autumn.

Half way along the valley, Hurkanos turned around and looked back in the direction of Akiva.

The great Hurkanos could barely see the couple.

They waved at each other and Hurkanos shouted as loud as he could:

“Akiva, what is the purpose of mankind?”

**And the mountains of Galilee echoed back – kind man, kind man, kind man.....<sup>28</sup>**

---

<sup>28</sup> **Echoed back** – When the words of an echo are reflected back, it can sometimes seem that the words return in reverse order. This phenomenon can be simulated by simply speaking the word ‘mankind’ rapidly and repeatedly. After a few times you suddenly realise that it sounds like you are saying ‘kind man’. The echo creates a similar audio experience, suggesting that Mother Nature is speaking to you; giving you the answer.

## Chapter 7: Jerusalem of Gold

The following day, Akiva went to the goldsmith's shop with the two gift boxes he had received from Hurkanos.

The goldsmith opened the two gift boxes and saw the great beauty of the diamond and the crown.

"Very expensive diamond," said the goldsmith and studied the stone carefully.

"What do you want me to do with it?"

"I want you to merge them together to make a *Jerusalem of Gold*," Akiva said.

"A *Jerusalem of Gold* with a diamond! We would have to go all the way back to the time of the first temple to see anything like this. I do not know if my diamond cutter can do this," said the goldsmith, studying the crown.

"Is it too difficult to make?" asked Akiva surprised.

"I can, I can," said the goldsmith, "I was just thinking of what people would say if your wife would wear such jewellery."

Maybe he was also thinking of being well paid. Akiva paid the goldsmith a few gold pieces and went back home.

### The diamond is being cut and polished

The goldsmith's experienced diamond cutter made a fantastic shining jewel from the polished diamond and placed it on top of the crown.<sup>29</sup>

The diamond cutter was so proud of the result that he forgot to engrave it *Jerusalem of Gold*, but mistakenly engraved it *The Crown of Creation*.

Finally *The Crown of Creation* was displayed in the centre of the shop window on the mirrored turntable, where other fine diamonds were placed. The softer gems were placed at the bottom of the window together with the other stones.

### The *Crown of Creation* diamond tells the story of The Gift Box

That night, in the goldsmith's shop, there was a lively debate amongst the diamonds.

"My story," said the *Crown of Creation*, "Oh! My story is of a long, long journey; yes indeed, a very long journey.

While you admire my reflections, none of you would envy my journey."

Then they spoke about the journey in great length.

"What was the most difficult part of your journey?" asked the other diamonds, and the gems listened too.

"The gift box,"<sup>30</sup> said the *Crown of Creation*, "the gift box was the most difficult part; not being able to see, no feeling of hope."

"So what did you do?" asked the diamonds.

"I do not know for how many years I was in the darkness inside the gift box, but one day the lid of the gift box was taken off."

---

<sup>29</sup> **Polished diamond** – The polished diamond for the '*Crown of Creation*' was polished further, which is unusual in the real world. Normally, a diamond is cut to its maximum. One would not cut it further, but would take a new raw diamond for a new purpose. A polished diamond can be re-cut, although it will further diminish in size.

<sup>30</sup> **The gift box** – While having the feeling of being kept in darkness, we tend to forget that we are wrapped in a gift box. Only precious things are kept in gift boxes. Eventually the lid will be taken off the gift box and light will bring back sight and sense of orientation.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

"Who took it off?" the diamonds asked curiously.

"I do not know," said the *Crown of Creation*, "I really do not know who took it off. I could not have done it myself, because I could not see, I did not know where I was and had lost my sense of orientation. But when the lid of the gift box was taken off, the light of hope began to shine on me. I regained my sense of orientation, and when the ray of light went through me I started speaking again and remembering again; I remembered the Sun, the Moon and Creation."

Suddenly someone interrupted the conversation.

The gold ring with a blue-coloured diamond asked everyone, "What is that raw diamond doing down there with the gems?"

"Oh, that one," said the gold ring with a red-tinted diamond, "well, it could not get along with the diamond cutter. You know; too many arguments. The cutting was too hard; it couldn't go through the cutting process and eventually the goldsmith decided not to cut it. So it lost its value and was placed together with the soft gems who cannot take cutting either. Anyway, now the diamond and the gem live together and are happily married." "If they are happily married, everything must be fine," said the *Crown of Creation*.

"You could say so," answered the gold ring,

"you could say so."

### Chapter 8: The glass diamond

In the corner of the window was a piece of glass that pretended to be a diamond.

The glass diamond was never considered by any customers and the glass diamond had a clear reason for that - "this was God's will!"

But most of the real diamonds and gems were of a different opinion. They believed that the true reason must have been the simple fact that the glass diamond was placed too far behind the other turntables of the front display so that no customer noticed it.

The glass diamond had a strong belief in understanding everything from the Torah, which it read all the time.

The glass diamond's own understanding of the Bible and its view of the world was calibrated according to its own intelligence and experience.

#### **Bitterness grew in the glass diamond**

Every day, because it was overlooked by all the customers, bitterness grew in the glass diamond<sup>31</sup>.

"I am being tested, I am being tested," the glass diamond often said.

It felt it had to give a reason to the other gems for its lack of success.

As time passed by, the bitterness reached new levels and the glass diamonds jealousy toward the true diamonds knew no bounds.

That night in the goldsmith's shop the glass diamond said: "I am a diamond with a great heritage. None of you know of my pure lineage. My grand parents were true River diamonds of finest cut." None of the diamonds believed in what the glass diamond said, because they all knew that it had no documents that proved its statement.

---

<sup>31</sup> **Bitterness grew in the glass diamond** – For some people life goes from 'bitter to better'. For other people, bitterness consumes them.

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

The glass diamond sensed this and it became more and more desperate.

Wanting to gain respect from the other true diamonds, it came up with something it thought was a smart trick. "I just read the following in the Torah," said the glass diamond.

"It says that God is called 'el', and that a Jew together with his 'el' is a "Jewel".<sup>32</sup>

The glass diamond was trying to 'prove' that it was a true diamond regardless of the poor quality of its documents.

"Was the glass diamond trying to make a pun?" asked the simple gems. "Let us match him," they said, "let us match him."<sup>33</sup>

One of the funniest gems, the Jester,<sup>34</sup> stepped forward and said,

*"Pun is fun,  
but sometimes it leaves things undone.  
Like the accountant who wrote,  
on a single note:  
Two plus three plus four plus seven,  
to add things is to be in Heaven.  
He wasn't philosophic  
in his topic,  
but he had great fun  
with his pun."*

All the gems laughed.

"Does that make me a diamond?" asked the Jester gem. "Should that tell me that I got a special message from God?"

Upon hearing this, the glass diamond blushed a deep red. For a moment the gems thought that the glass diamond was a ruby, but then something strange happened.

The glass diamond turned from red to black and then cracked.<sup>35</sup>

All the gems looked at the cracked glass diamond; they could not believe their eyes, but the glass diamond had cracked.

"That makes everything very clear," said the gold ring with the red diamond. "All that the glass diamond had been saying was not true, because a true diamond does not crack."

"Where do we learn this?" asked the gold ring with the red diamond,

"We learn it from the diamond cutter, we learn it from the shop owner and we learn it from the customers.

A true diamond does not crack."

All the gems and diamonds agreed, and since that night not one of them has tried to cheat about their lineage.

---

<sup>32</sup> **Elementary school mathematics** – 'Jew' + 'el' = 'Jewel'.

<sup>33</sup> **"Let's match him"** – It was not nice to 'gang up' against the glass diamond, but the gems were finally provoked by the glass diamond; hence they tried to match its smartness and wit.

<sup>34</sup> **Jester** – The jester is also called 'joker' or 'wild card'. The jester can be unpredictable.

<sup>35</sup> **Red to black and cracked** – It is a Talmudic opinion that if you embarrass someone publicly (in front of a minimum of ten people), then it is as if you have killed that person, who becomes embarrassed (red), and dies (black). The glass diamond cracked because it tried to fake its spiritual level. A true diamond can handle insults. It is one of the features of an enlightened person; a prerequisite for the Meditators.

## Chapter 9: The prophecy

The next day, the wife of Akiva went to the jewellery shop to collect her *Jerusalem of Gold*.

While standing outside the shop, she looked at all the jewellery displayed in the window.

All of the jewellery was looking back at her too and they admired her.

There was something special about Akiva's wife.

The gold-rings were saying: "Oh if I could just get on her fingers," and *The Crown of Creation* were saying: "If only I could rest on her head."

Even the raw diamond became soft for a moment, wishing it had gone through the cutting process.

When Akiva's wife entered the shop each item of jewellery listened to her, hoping they would be the chosen one.

"My husband gave you a diamond," she said to the shop owner.

"Did you hear it, did you hear it," said the raw diamond, "she wanted a raw diamond."

"Wishful thinking," shouted all the diamonds, "wishful thinking."

They were right, the lady did not ask for the raw diamond.

### **Yerushalayim shel zahav**

"Yes, that is true," answered the shop owner, "and we have finished the cutting and merged it with the crown."

Then he went to the mirrored turntable where the jewellery was displayed and picked up the *Crown of Creation*.

"Shall I put it in a gift box or do you want to wear it straight away?" asked the shop owner.

"I want to wear it straight away," answered Akiva's wife with great joy.

All her life she had been longing for a *Jerusalem of Gold*, a 'Yerushalayim shel zahav'.<sup>36</sup>

### **Akiva's beloved wife with a *Jerusalem of Gold***

Akiva was chopping wood outside their hut, when he noticed his beloved wife walking towards him with the *Jerusalem of Gold*.

Akiva did not know what to say.

The contrast between his peasant life and yet having a wife with a crown made of pure gold with a diamond was difficult for him to grasp. Such riches had never been within his reach. Akiva could see that his wife must have felt the same.

When they ate dinner together, Akiva's wife wore the crown.

When they went to bed, Akiva's wife was still wearing the crown,

and when they woke up the next morning, she still had not taken off the crown.

---

<sup>36</sup> '**Jerusalem of Gold**' – In ancient Israel there was such a piece of jewellery called 'Jerusalem of Gold'. In Hebrew, 'Yerushalayim shel zahav'.

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

**The vision**

That morning they were both awake and lying next to each other in the bed.

They did not speak.

There was a strange mood over both of them. How would their future be?

The sun was looking into their room and suddenly rays of sunlight struck the diamond and a strong light emanated from the crown.

"Akiva, I see a vision, Akiva, I see a vision," his beloved wife said in a kind of panic.

"What do you see, Rifka, what do you see?" Akiva asked his wife.

"I see your life," she said.

"Not our life?" asked Akiva.

"I see your life," Rifka repeated.

"I see, the letter of recommendation you received from Hurkanos - yes, the letter has been handed over to Kalba Savua, the wealthy landowner of Jerusalem.

With that letter of recommendation you have become the head of shepherds for all Jerusalem....,

now you are getting married again, with a woman called Rachel....,

three children; lovely children....

Akiva, you have become a rabbi, a great rabbi with many students - there must be thousands of them following you from all over Israel."

"A rabbi?" asked Akiva.

"Yes, a rabbi; and you studied with our friend Nachum Gamzu." Rifka said.

"I studied with Nachum Gamzu?!" Akiva said in his disbelief.

However, Akiva could feel that his wife Rifka was really telling him something that was not mere nonsense talk.

"Then you are getting married again - for the third time!

This time it is with the wife of a Roman general," Rifka said.

"The wife of a Roman general?" said Akiva. "Is she Jewish?"

"No," answered Rifka, "but she insisted on marrying you and insisted on converting to Judaism.

It seems that you had no choice but to marry her, although you appear to be very old now.

This is a very strange vision."

Akiva agreed that it was, indeed, a very strange vision.

Then he became thoughtful, "Prophecy and visions are not always a sign of something that will happen - it shows a potential and nothing more."

A cloud passed over their home and the rays of sunlight ended; the diamond stopped shining.

## Chapter 10: Akiva embraced Rifka and blessed her

Rifka became sad and upset.

She stepped out of her bed and cried: "You are getting married all the time. What about me?"

Rifka took off her crown and placed it on the table, saying,

"I don't want it anymore, I don't want it."

Akiva went over to his wife and tried to comfort her.

She was standing next to the window, watching their neighbouring children playing games together.

"All your life," Akiva whispered to his wife,

"all your life you wanted a *Jerusalem of Gold*,

but now when you have it,

you don't want it."

"Why did I have to see all this? Why?" Rifka asked.

Akiva placed his arm around her shoulders,

"What you saw might not happen. But if any of it happens, then it is because of your great help and support."

"What do you mean?" asked Rifka.

Akiva explained: "If you had not stayed calm throughout all our marriage, I might have acted in an agitated way when Hurkanos told me he could not pay my three years of accumulated wages.

Had I lost my temper with Hurkanos, then I would not have received the letter of recommendation which in turn gave me the job with Kalba Savua,

which led me to marry Rachel,

which led me to study Torah,

which led me to become one of the greatest rabbi's of Israel."

Rifka was not impressed: "Ah, you would have achieved the same through a different path. It would still have happened."

With a stern face, Akiva said: "Rifka, I disagree with you. It is not always that one gets a second chance - sometimes one misses a unique opportunity. To say that it would still have happened is a lack of gratitude towards your share in my journey.

Rifka, of all people you have the greatest share in my journey."

Then Akiva embraced Rifka and blessed her.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> **Blessed her** – When a person is blessed, the mind expands being able to cope with greater challenges. The 'container' is able to contain greater things.

## Chapter 11: Back in the British Museum

"That all folks," said the device back in the British Museum.

"That's the end of the story."

The device retracted its screen and the globe closed around it.

Suddenly a wild debate started among the statues.

"Is he like us or is it a machine?" said the Greek statue to all the other statues.

"It is a machine," said the gladiator, "I want to destroy it!"

"No, no," said the trans-human device, terrified. "I am more human than machine."

"Anyone can claim that," said the gladiator.

"Yes, anyone can claim that," yelled the rest of the statues, sounding like a 'debate' in the British Parliament.

"Do you have consciousness?" asked the swami.

"Do you have intuition?" asked the black statue.

"Do you have a soul?" asked the Greek statue that looked like Socrates.

"Do you pay taxes?" asked the senator.

"Do you have citizenship?"

"I...I...I don't have an answer to this," answered the device nervously.

"You don't have an answer to this?" said the swami, questioning the device's ability to use common-sense.

The statue of a Hasidic rabbi stepped forward, "Do you have sexual desire?"

"No," answered the trans-human device.

"Do you have feelings of greed?" asked the Hasidic rabbi.

"No," answered the device.

"Then he is an enlightened person," said the swami, joyously.

"Well, it depends on how he has accomplished it," said the Hasidic rabbi.

The rabbi looked very intensely at the device and asked: "How is it that you do not have any desire for sex or any greed?"

Without any feeling of embarrassment or shame the device said:<sup>38</sup> "My master downloads a certain setting to which I am adjusted."

The Hasidic rabbi thought for a moment, "Well, that means that you have no free will. You could be classified as an angel, but you are certainly not a human."

The Greek statue asked the senator: "If the device is not classified as human, would the gladiator be punished for 'killing' it?"

The senator stepped forward, "No, in that case we cannot use the word 'killing'. We would have to use the word 'destroying', like when you are destroying property. The penalty for collateral damage is a 'financial penalty', to be claimed by the owner of the machine. Who is the owner of that machine?" he asked.

The device became increasingly desperate "If I win over the senator in a public debate, then I must be classified as human, isn't that right?"

The senator thought for a moment and then said: "I am not sure about that statement. If the gladiator 'kills' you, we should be able to see blood. However, if the gladiator 'destroys' you, we will only see the damage done to a machine. Just because you have features similar to a human, it doesn't mean that you are a human."

The rabbi agreed, "Maybe the device is sharp in certain situations, while in other situations it doesn't appear that the device has any 'common-sense'.

---

<sup>38</sup> **Without any feeling of embarrassment or shame** – A machine has no concept of embarrassment. Except for toddlers or people with certain conditions, humans are normally sensitive to embarrassment or shame. As President Obama said in early August 2008 with regards to the oil-drilling debate, "*some people take pride in being ignorant*".

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Furthermore, as the senator said, the device has no blood and it has no consciousness.”

The black statue looked at the rabbi and said: “Is common sense a criterion for being human?”

Then the black statue looked at the senator and all the other statues, saying: “How do we understand ‘common-sense’? Isn’t ‘common-sense’ a relative thing?”

“That means I can ‘destroy’ the device,” said the gladiator, and all the Roman statues in the room encouraged the gladiator to destroy the device.

“Yes, go and get him; go and get him.” The gladiator stepped closer to the device.

“Wait a moment,” said the tall black statue, which stopped the gladiator from moving further.

The black statue looked at the trans-human device and asked, “I am willing to give you one chance.”

“Yes, yes,” begged the device.

“Can you tell us the story of William Wilberforce? If you can tell us the story, you will live. If not, you will die.”

The device reached a level of desperation that it had never experienced before. “Will...Willi...William... William Wilberforce? Erm, I have definitely heard of him. Aaah, I think...ahem...was he Chinese?”

“Go and get it,” said the black statue to the gladiator, “go and get it. This device has obviously no common-sense. It is all yours.”

The gladiator stepped closer and closer, then raised its metal club - it was just about to smash the device into a million pieces when, in the same moment, the door opened and in came Joe Blumenthal.

All the statues stood still.  
None of them dared to move.

Joe whistled and the device whistled back. “Ah, there you are,” said Joe, “I have been searching for you for hours. Let me take you home.”

Where was home for the trans-human device? – The great State of Massachusetts!<sup>39</sup>

Joe Blumenthal handed back the device to its creator for further improvement.

Yes, further improvement – that’s what we need for mankind.

Written by Benjamin Kurzweil, September 2008.

---

<sup>39</sup> **The great State of Massachusetts** – Massachusetts is very advanced in the science of artificial intelligence. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a leader in this field.

## Appendix A: Remake of ancient poems

Below you will find a poem in a rhymed remake of the first poem of Tao Te Ching

### The name of the game

The Tao that can be told  
is not the real Tao to unfold.

What can be named  
through words,  
is temporarily famed  
in outer worlds.

What cannot be named  
through words,  
is eternally famed  
in inner worlds.

The person who does not seek outside oneself,  
will realise the hidden.  
The person who seeks outside oneself,  
will realise the written.

The hidden  
and the written,  
although two different words,  
for two different worlds,  
both arise from the same source  
and the exact same force.

Both are they  
the mystery  
of mysteries,  
- the door to wholeness.

### 1

Dao ke dao,  
fei chang dao.

Ming ke ming,  
fei chang ming.

Wu, ming tian di zhi shi.  
you, ming wan wu zhi mu.

Gu chang wu, yu yi guan qi miao,  
chang you, yu yi guan qi jiao.

ci liang zhe, tong chu er yi ming.

Tong wei zhi xuan,  
xuan zhi you xuan,

zhong miao zhi men.

(The original text in Pinyin Romanization - notice the rhyming.)

## Aesop style short stories for all ages - Ultra short stories

Below you will find a poem in a rhymed remake of the second poem of Tao Te Ching

### Wu Wei – the better way

People perceive beauty as beautiful  
because they see other things as ugly.

People perceive good as good  
because they see other things as bad.

Being  
and non-being  
arise from the same place.

Difficulty and easiness  
define each others space.

Long and short  
complement each others face.

The same with  
high and low  
sound and stillness  
time and space.

Therefore the wise goes about  
doing **Wu Wei**  
the better way,  
and teaches without uttering a word a day.

Events and things come and go continuously;  
the wise is creating without possessing hideously,  
the wise is working without taking credit for the edit.

Work is done and then forgotten,  
moving on to the next all of a sudden.

Therefore it lasts forever.

### 2

Tian xia jie zhi mei zhi wei mei,  
si e yi;  
jie zhi shan zhi wei shan,  
si bu shan yi.

Gu you wu xiang sheng,  
nan yi xiang cheng,

chang duan xiang xing,  
gao xia xiang qing,

yin sheng xiang he,  
qian hou xiang sui.

Shi yi sheng ren  
chu **wu wei** zhi shi,  
xing bu yan zhi jiao;  
wan wu zuo er fu shi,  
sheng er fu you,  
wei er bu shi,  
gong cheng er fu ju.  
Fu wei fu ju,  
shi yi bu qu.

(The original text in Pinyin Romanization - notice the rhyming.)

**Wu Wei** – One of Taoism's most important concepts is Wu Wei, which is sometimes translated as "non-doing" or "non-action". We are dealing with non-attachment to the action. It is the higher self that does the action, therefore Wu Wei is classified as a "non-action" from the egos point of view, but it is an action – this is not a situation where you are sitting still on your buttocks. It is the attitude towards the action that is the point here. And because the ego is not having a say in the action, the action is "non-doing". Wu Wei is also explained as "A spontaneous, non-striving action flow from the Tao".

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories

**Appendix B: Comic puns**

**Good morning or good mourning?**

**Attitude is often the difference in the belonging.**

**Both are part of life's moulding,  
but I still prefer the first to be unfolding.**



**Less hair, more air.**

**You would think better, and have more flair.**

**Unless you are a woman, full of fear,  
losing your hair, would lead to despair.**



**Pun is Fun,**

**but sometimes it leaves things undone.**

**Like the accountant who wrote, on a single note:**

***“Two plus three plus four plus seven,  
to add things is to be in heaven.”***

**He wasn't philosophic, in his topic,  
but he had great fun, with his pun.**

**Aesop style short stories for all ages**  
- Ultra short stories



**To bumble-bee  
or to humble-bee?**

**That is the question,  
for you and me.**

**Shakespeare, did not appear,  
for you to eat, apple or pear.**

**Turn the fruit nectar, and all your money,  
into wisdom, and beautiful honey.**

**Better to become humble, without a mumble,  
than to fumble, like a bumble.**

